SPECIAL DC THOMSON ISSUE!

Crikey!
6
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Crikey!

THE GREAT BRITISH COMICS MAGAZINE!

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The Paper With "THE TOUGH OF THE TRACK"
THE VICTOR
EVERY MONDAY
Price 6d
No. 506
Oct. 31st
1970.
GUARD THE PASSES!
In 1916, during the first World War, German agents infiltrated into the wild areas between Persia and British India to bribe the tribesmen to rise and fight the British. Brigadier-General Dyer was sent with a small force to tackle these native raiders. His men, mostly the 28th Cavalry of the Indian Army, were camped near Sarlind, when Chief Hadi Khan and his warriors crept up on them. But one tribesman made a mistake.
In the fight which followed Hadi Khan was killed.
A RANSOM
CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

The paper with THE TOUGH OF THE TRACK
THE VICTOR
EVERY MONDAY
Price 5d
No. 313
FEB. 18th
1967
THE BOGUS GUN
The tank played an important part in the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, during the Second World War - but not always in its conventional role or form.
LST
Shortly before the landings
CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

TRUE STORIES OF MEN AT WAR

BY COLIN NOBLE

How often have we read books such as Bravo Two Zero *or* Tornado Down! *More often than some of us would care to admit, I am willing to wager. These true-tales books follow a grand tradition in British writing and it was no more obvious than in the boys comics published by D C Thomson.*

The most obvious example of this type of true-life story is the Victor. For 26 years, the true story was the defining part about *Victor*. You would of course get your stories about Alf Tupper, Morgyn the Mighty, Gorgeous Gus, Wee Bandy the sporting cattleman and some misfit in the army like Slim Jim, the Fighting Cook or Joe Bones, the scruffiest soldier. The cover, however, was reserved for more important things like Lance Corporal Bill Angus rescuing his platoon commander whilst under heavy enemy fire during World War One and being awarded the VC for doing so.

VICTOR WRITES HISTORY

Victor's true stories have a provenance that is unimpeachable. Each and every story that I have looked at can be confirmed by the wonder that is the internet. The stories that can't be confirmed by the Internet, can be summed up by a contributor to www.comicsuk.co.uk by the strange name of Cap Storm (can't imagine where that came from!) who wrote "If it's not on the Net, it just means that someone hasn't put it there yet."

To date, I have only found one error and in pre-internet days, it is a minor error that can be forgiven. The error can be found in issue 1139 dated 18 Dec 82 where the *Victor* describes the bombing raid on the Zeppelin base at Friedrichshafen on 21 Nov 1914 as the "first organised bombing raid" when it was actually the third or fourth. Not bad considering the only reference books were the ones in the office and those found in Dundee's libraries.

COVERING FIRE

The first issue of *Victor* contained a true story hidden on pages 18 to 19. It wasn't until issue 2 that the true stories captured their proper place of being a story that was the front and back cover.

This was unusual as many comics of the time used the front cover as a splash page to encourage you to buy

the flashiest, shiniest comic on the stand and the back cover as a revenue booster for a colour advert. By ignoring tradition, *The Victor* was one of the first comics to give you a story in full colour. These days, that isn't a big deal as almost all comics are printed in colour, but back in 1961, that was a big thing.

The Victor wasn't the only comic that featured true stories as covers. Sister comic *The Hornet* also used true stories, but the *Hornet*'s remit was much more wide-ranging as it dealt with true stories from the Crusades up to contemporary conflicts such as Vietnam. It also featured stories of heroism from ordinary people such as that of Constable Johnston of Coquitalm, British Columbia when he helped to foil a bank robbery in 1956 (issue 107 dated 25 Sep 1965).

The New Hotspur also got into the act during the '60s but as the readership of the *Hotspur* was considered to be different to that of the *Hornet* and *Victor* and their cover stories were almost exclusively from the Wild West.

The Victor's cover story remit was aimed almost exclusively at World War One and World War Two. To date I have only found six stories that are not from that period and they are all from the inter-war period from 1919 to 1938. One story details the destruction of six ships when the Royal Navy went to aid the Czar's loyalist troops on 17 August 1919 ('Strike Force!' issue 457 dated 22 Nov 69). A further two detail aspects of the Arab rebellion when insurrectionists sabotaged the Baghdad to Basra rail-link in 1920 – that doesn't sound familiar, does it! ('The Water Carrier' issue 590 dated 10 Jun 72 and 'One Hat Too Many!' issue 678 dated 16 Feb 74). The fourth, related the use of British troops during the 1921 Moplah riots in colonial India ('Routing The Rebels' issue 740 dated 26 Apr 75). Fifthly there was the daring rescue of a member of the 4th (Prince Of Wales) Gurkhas during the guerilla war on the North West Frontier in 1937 ('The Man Who Ran Away' issue 691 dated 18 May 74). The final one of the six told how the Northamptonshire Regiment took a ridge on 9 Sep 1937 ('The Red Devil Of The Frontier' issue 668 dated 8 Dec 73).

Apart from these few, however, *Victor* true stories stayed very much in the theatres of the world wars.

TWICE TOLD TALES

While most people associate the true cover stories as detailing VC winners, not all of the stories detailed VC citations.

To date, only 203 stories out of 807 actually detailed VC winners and some of those were reprints. (While compiling this article my index has risen from 606 issues to 807, so I have continually had to update the numbers!)

Ah reprint; the bane of a comic collector's life.

Reprints are a cheap way of putting in filler material when new material is either not available or the company is trying to save a few pennies. While we can find plenty of reprints inside the *Victor*, it was 11 years before a cover story was re-used and from then on, they were reused on a fairly regular basis.

So far, I have identified 178 reprint stories and of those, 26 were secondary reprints. No doubt this total will rise as I fill in the gaps of my collection.

A SAMPLE OF INTERIOR PAGES FROM THE VICTOR: GREAT SCRIPTS, SOLID STORYTELLING AND BEAUTIFUL ART.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
IN THE VALLEY OF SAND-SWEPT ROCK & RED CHOICE. FOR THERE IS ONLY AN ENTRANCE AND AN EXIT, AND MOST OF THE TRIBE STAYED WITH THE HERDS.
THERE ARE ONLY TWO PASSES INTO THE VALLEY, SAHIB. THE NORTH ENTRANCE AND ONE AT THE SOUTH. WITH ONE MEN THEY HAVE NOT, THEY CAN GUARD EACH ONE OF THE ENTRANCES EASILY.
THEN WE MUST TRY TO FOOL THEM A BIT. SEE CAPTAIN BROWNLOW TO COME AND SEE ME.
KEEP SPREAD OUT, MEN AND YOU KICK UP PLENTY OF DUST.
AH, HERE THEY COME, HEADING FOR THE NORTH PASS INTO THE VALLEY. I WILL WARN EVERYBODY SO THAT WE ARE READY FOR THEM.
WAIT. I DO NOT TRUST THE BRITISH. THEY WILL NOT ATTACK TONIGHT IN ANY CASE. PERHAPS THEY WILL TURN BACK.
RIGHT! NOW I WANT EVERY ONE OF THOSE RIFLES SET ALIGHT. EACH MAN TAKE ONE.
YOU SAID THEY HAVE NOT MADE CAMP FOR THE NIGHT. THERE ARE THOSE CAMP FIRES.
THAT IS TRUE! NOW WE ARE CERTAIN THEY WILL TRY TO FORCE THE NORTH PASS.
BRING YOUR HORSES TO START WITH. KEEP THEM QUIET.
CLEAR OFF STRAIGHT THROUGH. THERE'S HARDLY A MAN HERE!
WHAT IS THAT? WE HAVE BEEN TRICKED AND THEY ARE COMING IN AT THE OTHER PASS BACK TO THE NORTH!
HERE THEY COME, BUT THEY'RE TOO LATE! FIGHT THEM OFF UNTIL WE GET THROUGH OUT OF THE VALLEY.
AIEE, ALL IS LOST! THEY HAVE TAKEN THE HERDS.
NEAR THIS HALT, KHAN WAS KILLED BY THE GERMANS AND HE HAS LOST HIS LIFE AND HIS HERDS. HAND IN YOUR WEAPONS NOW AND MAKE PEACE WITH THE KING-EMPEROR, AND NO HARM WILL BEFALL YOU!

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
HERE, LIKE AFTER THE SLOPE, I'M GOING BACK FOR SOME MORE OF 'EM.
Meanwhile . . .
GET DIGGING AS MANY SLIT TRENCHES AS YOU CAN BEFORE THE JERRIES COME UP.
HERE THEY COME! OPEN UP WITH THE BREN. THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE GOING TO RUN IT RIGHT UP!
LET 'EM HAVE IT!
THEY'RE RETREATING! WE'VE GOT THEM ON THE RUN, SARGE!
Shortly afterwards . . .
DON'T START SHOUTING YET! THEY'VE JUST BEEN HOLDING THE DEFENCES. THEY'LL BE BACK.
WE'VE GOT ONE OF THEM BUT THE OTHER WILL GET IT BEFORE WE RETREAT BACK TO THE SLIT TRENCHES!
LOUIS TAMKY! WHEN IT'S SAFE TO DO SO, GET THE P.I.A.T. I'VE USED FORWARD OF AGAINST THAT MEDIUM. QUICKLY! MOVE, MEN!
AAAARGH!
IT THERE'S NOT THE SARGE IN THE LINE. GIVE US A HAND WITH HIM.
I WAS LUCKY. HE COULD HAVE KILLED ME. JUST THE FIRST AID DRESSING FOUND TO STOP THE BLEEDING.
YOU JUST STAY PUT! I'M GOING TO GET THAT TANK.
YOU'RE BACK, PUDDEN, SARGE! STAY ALL NIGHT AND HAVE IT!
Showing remarkable courage, Charlie Hopkins headed for the P.I.A.T.
NOW I'LL SHOW 'EM!
And he made his kill. For this deed, Sergeant Hopkins was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Corporal C. Thistle won a Military Medal for his bravery on that day.
HE'S DONE IT! HE'S KNOCKED THE PANZER!

REPEAT DEFENDER

Surprisingly, four people have had more than one cover dedicated to them. One was Canadian fighter ace George "Buzz" Beurling ('Screwball Over Malta!' issue 415 dated 1 Feb 69 and issue 768 dated 8 Nov 75).

Second was Paddy Mayne ('The Fire Eater Of The S.A.S.' issue 680 dated 2 Mar 74 and 'Nothing Stops The S.A.S.' issue 694 dated 8 Jun 74).

The third person to be thus honoured was Albert Jacka and his honour was even more unusual in that it was over consecutive issues ('The Boy From Bendigo' issue 603 dated 9 Sep 72 and 'The Fighting Jackaroo' issue 604 dated 16 Sep 72).

The fourth holds the record as Lt Col Vic Turner VC has featured on three covers that I have found so far. In two of these covers, he is the star of the show but in the third he has a supporting part. ('Tank Killer' issue 174 dated 20 Jun 64, 'A Nice Cuppa!' issue 644 dated 23 Jun 73 and issue 1288 dated 26 Oct 85).

I may discover another one as I am sure that Sqn Ldr 'Sailor' Malan has had a couple of covers dedicated to him, but until I get the comics, this is only a guess.

Even more surprising is the fact that one story has been reprinted four times! The story that holds this unique honour is 'Rescue From No-Man's Land' which depicts Lance Corporal Bill Angus' heroic rescue of Lieutenant Martin as he lay wounded in No-Man's Land on 12 Jun 1915. This story appeared in issues 132 dated 31 Aug 63, 744 dated 24 May 74, 822 dated 20 Nov 76, 1120 dated 7 Aug 82 and 1271 dated 29 Jun 85.

The rule on how a story was selected for reprint seems to have not only been driven by economy but by common sense. Unknown to most of us, DCT has not one but two storage areas in Dundee. One is only a few minutes walk from Albert Square and the other is a 10 minute drive on a good day. So when it came to selecting a story for reprint, it made more sense to walk down the road to have a quick look through the closest archives to see what story could do with a quick airing and give them the next cover.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
Meanwhile . . .
Shortly afterwards . . .
Showing remarkable courage, Charlie Hopkins headed for the P.L.A.T.
And he made his kill. For this deed, Sergeant Hopkins was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Corporal C. Thirtle won a Military Medal for his bravery on that day.

CHANGE

This brings me cunningly on to how the stories changed over the years. Up to issue 765, all the stories had rousing titles such as 'The One Man Army' (issue 2 dated 4 Mar 61) or 'The Glorious Glow-Worm' (issue 54 dated 3 Mar 62), but on the release of issue 766, the titles had gone to be replaced by three symbols.

One was a grenade to represent Land stories, one was the Anchor, to represent Sea stories and the last was a set of pilot's wings to represent air stories. The reason for this is unknown, but if I can find one of the old *Victor* staff, I am sure that they can clear this mystery up.

PET THEORY

My own theory on this is that due to reduced profitability, D C Thomson had to find ways to save money. We are talking about 1975, raging unemployment, governments falling at the drop of a hat, rampant inflation, so I believe that the job for the staff writer who came up with the titles either retired or moved on.

So to save money, three appropriate macho symbols were decided upon and it saved someone from having to spend half a day coming up with a title that would be approved by the editor. Remember this is only speculation and I hope to tell the true reason in a later edition of *Crikey!*

SELECTION

The stories were of real people and touched people's lives.

This is evidenced by the recent documentary series about the Victoria Cross when Paul Magennis was interviewed. He remembered going to school one day and being accosted by all his pals while they were clutching their brand new *Victors* asking "Is that your Da there?" He was more than pleased to say, Yes, that was his Da that had been brave enough to plant Limpet mines on the hull of a Japanese cruiser.

Fame for him for that week!

How the stories were selected is another mystery. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the selection of heroic stories that were featured, but looking at it from a logical point of view, there were 626 VCs awarded during WW1 and 181 VCs awarded during WW2, so that should have kept the *Victor* in cover stories until at least issue 808, barring the breaks due to "Great Free Gift!".

So how were the stories selected? I have contacted DC Thomson and no-one now there has any idea as to how the criteria were applied to select the stories.

However, Ray Moore has kindly found out the answer.

It turns out that a member of staff was sent on a monthly trip to Dundee Library to research as many true stories as they could find. This was supplemented by an annual trip to the Imperial War Museum when some

lucky person would be sent to London to supplement the research carried out in Dundee. The stories published were the ones that the *Victor* staff could find most detail on. This explains why the stories differ so much as they only used stories that they had hard facts on.

ANNUALS AND SPECIALS

The Victor Annuals and *Summer Specials* were not exempt from publishing true stories either.

Surprisingly almost half of the annuals had a cover that was inspired by a true story. The 1968 annual was the first cover not to be inspired by a true story and the record gets erratic from there on with covers alternating depending on how good a story was.

The first *Victor Summer Special* cover that I can definitively associate with a true story is the 1972 publication. This has a picture of Mimi, an aircraft converted into a high speed boat by the Royal Australian Flying Corps as they interdicted Turkish use of the Dead Sea during the First World War. The last true story cover is the 1986 Summer Special and that dealt with the First World War Gallipoli campaign.

TAPS

All good things must come to an end and the last True Story Of Men At War cover was issue 1388 dated 26 Sep 87 (and not 1399 as I stated in *Crikey!* 2). This story was about two of the first uses of torpedoes to sink enemy shipping by Royal Flying Corps pilot Flight Lieutenant G B Dacre and by RNAS pilot Flight Commander C H K Edmonds in 1915.

The Victor staff worked hard to bring the *Victor* into the '80s and Jimmy Grant took advantage of the off-side rule to boot the story off the front page.

For aficionados, however, the true stories continued in the form of an occasional series of Action Stations! strips on the back page or filled an internal page of the Victor.

These were one-frame comics with a short paragraph to explain the picture.

Even these could not hold off the march of time as when *Victor* switched to glossy in issue 1573 (13 Apr 91) and the True stories were quietly dropped.

For those truly interested, the last Action Stations! was published in issue 1571 dated 31 Mar 91 and detailed how Pilot Officer C J Barton won the VC for his actions on the night of 30 Mar 1944 as he pressed home with a bombing run on Nuremberg despite his plane being crippled by a night fighter attack.

Not a bad innings at 30 years. The only character that has managed as well in recent times is Judge Dredd and he is still going strong with no signs of finishing soon.

For those curious in advancing the project of cataloging all the true stories or even looking at the raw data, get yourself over to the Scanarama group on Yahoo and download the Excel spreadsheet.

One last thing. My personal favourite True Story was the one where CSM Osborn, Winnipeg Grenadiers, led the counter-attack to displace Japanese forces that had taken Mount Butler, Hong Kong on 19 Dec 1941.

Several times, he threw back live Japanese grenades, but found himself too far way to return the last and threw his body upon the grenade to save the lives of his troops.

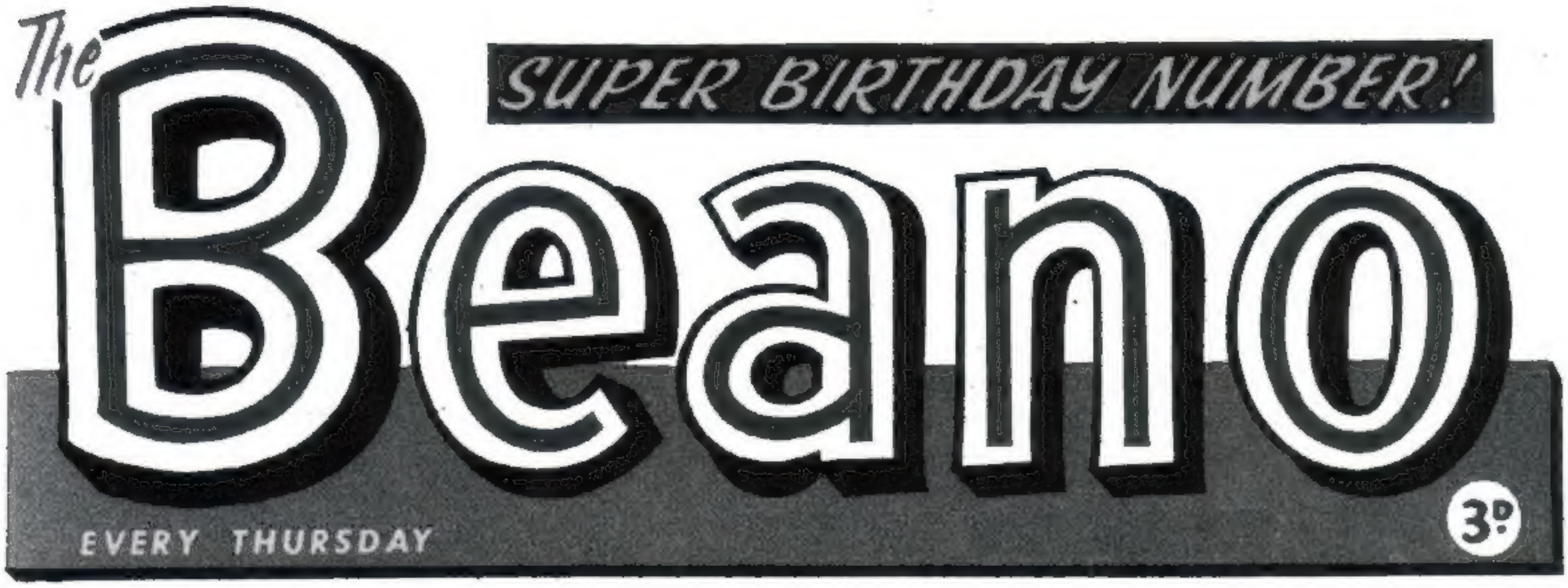
For this, he was posthumously awarded the VC. (Issues 842 dated 9 Apr 77 and 1369 dated 16 May 87)

I remember reading that story over and over so it must have been a slow Easter in '77! ●

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE
On June 11th, Captain Bland, of the 90th City of London Field Regiment, was an artillery observation officer in a converted Sherman tank near Cristot in France.
NICE SHOOTING, LADS. NOW FOR YOUR NEXT TARGET.
THIS TANK OBSERVATION POST IS A FIRST-RATE IDEA.
YES, BLAND'S DOING A FINE JOB.
But the Green Howards had not been let into the secret of the bogus gun.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT TANK, MATE? HAS IT FIRED ITS LAST SHOT, OR SOMETHING?
JUST LIKE THE TANKS, LEADING US ALL TO THE SLAUGHTER.
But the tank's only armament was a machine-gun.
WHAT YOU GOT A GUN FOR, THEN? WHY DON'T YOU USE IT?
HUMMUH! HE'S HAVING A GO ABOUT THAT BOY!
THERE'S NOTHING FOR IT, WE'LL HAVE TO GO FORWARD.
Puzzled by the stench, the signaller, who had been watching through his periscope, raised his hatch to see what was wrong, and caused the anti-tank gun bullets to ricochet in the direction of the infantrymen.
WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?
BLIMEY! THEY'RE SHOOTING AT US, MATE!
IT'S NO USE. WE'LL JUST HAVE TO CARRY ON WITH OUR PROPER JOB.
WHAT'S THAT? A MACHINE GUN? WHAT ABOUT THE AT GUN CREW?
That night the infantrymen were let into the secret of the bogus gun.
SO YOU SEE, LADS, THEY HAD TO REMOVE THE GUN TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE SPECIAL EQUIPMENT. AND THAT'S OUT THE GUNNERS WERE RING ON TARGET TONIGHT.
WELL I'M BLOWED!
Next day
THERE'S ANOTHER OF THOSE CONVERTED TANKS.
A CROCODILE, THAT ONE'S CALLED. IT HAS A FLAME THROWER INSTEAD OF AN ORDINARY GUN.
A few minutes later
WHO DOES THE CHARGE WITH THE BODY WITH.
WHATEVER WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?

CECIL THE STONE-AGE SCRAPPER
RETURNS IN A GREAT NEW STORY INSIDE!
THE VICTOR
EVERY MONDAY
Price 6d
No. 507 Nov. 7th 1970.
MAN WITH A SHOVEL
On August 11th, 1944, during the Second World War, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Norfolk Regiment had reached Sourdeval in Normandy when they ran into trouble.
BRRRRRP!
Shortly afterwards, Typhoons of the Tactical Air Force made a tragic mistake.
THEY'RE ON OUR OWN LINES, AND THEY'RE FIRING AT US!
Sergeant Charlie Hopkins rounded up his platoon.
FALL IN OVER THERE, LADS. IF YOU AND YOUR MATES HAVE BEEN WORKING YOUR WAY UP THE SPARES LIST, WE ARE GOING TO BE SHORT OF A FEW MORE BEFORE THE DAY IS OUT!
Willie Hopkins got his men organised, Corporal Thirtle was risking his life.
OUT WITH THE MEN, YOU LAZY DEAD YET!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!



70 years ago this July (30th to be exact), the first issue of *The Beano* flopped on to the newsagents counters. It was colourful, visually explosive and brimming with humour, adventure and character.

70 years later *The Beano 70 Years of Fun Special Collector's Edition* flops onto the newsagents racks. It's colourful, visually explosive and brimming with humour, adventure and character. I guess what the French say is true – "Everything changes, everything stays the same". Of course, they say it in French.

This is first and foremost a magazine (there is a DCT coffee table book planned for later in the year) and it plays to its limitations – not too many pages (68) and so much to cover – by going full out on the page design. In doing so it delivers a highly charged visual buzz with fantastic reproductions on glossy paper that captures the shades, textures and gradations of the originals. Visually it is a stand out job.

The text has been kept to a minimum in order to allow the pages to

breathe and to let us savour the amazing artwork samples. What text there is, however, is polished and highly informative. Knowing that the text was to be kept to a minimum, the writer has stuck to the facts and produced a brilliantly cogent, synopic history of *The Beano*.

It's a colourful – and I mean colourful – rapid-pace history of characters and creators over the past 70 years (plus a little peak into plans about to unfold).

A very nice aspect for British fans is the high-quality reproduction – often from the original artwork. In places you can clearly see areas where elements have been pasted over. Pages have the original code numbers pencilled on. You get a real sense of looking at something historic.

Whereas some DCT collectors have complained in the past about the fragmented layouts of the white DCT Christmas books, there is nothing to distract the eye here. Layouts are crisp, clear, inventive and appropriate.

The only problem I can see with the whole project is DCT's decision to produce a die-cut cover. Whilst the use of a gold metallic ink against a white background certainly catches the eye and advertises the high-quality production values, I have concerns about how well it will survive when racked in the comic section of the local WHS or similar.

That's a small nit-pick, however, and if you get to the shop smartish, you should still be able to get your mint edition. ●

No matter what genre, period or character you like the most, you will find DCT's one-shot special celebrating the highs of Britain's favourite comic is a must have for collectors and readers alike.

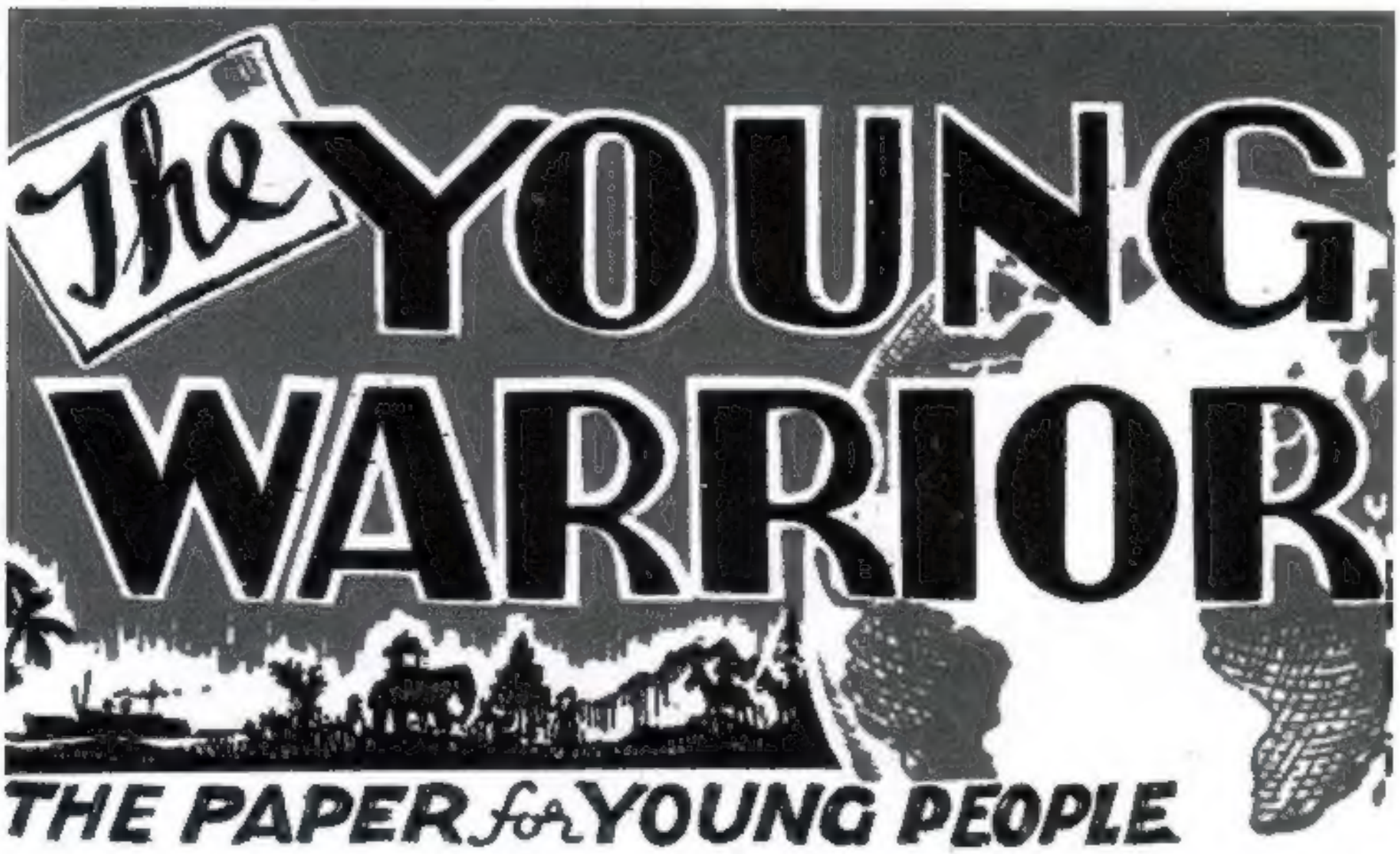
THE YOUNG WARRIOR

OR - HOW IN GOD'S NAME DID HE DO IT?

By Peter Hansen

Although there is little doubt that Dudley Watkins was one of Britain's most accomplished comic artists, comfortable and well versed in both humour and adventure styles, what made him truly exceptional was his productivity.

Throughout his lifetime Dudley produced voluminous amounts of work, all of it with his own usual high quality. Clearly he was influenced by earlier greats such as Tom Browne and some of the great DC Thomson studio staff artists working alongside Dudley when he joined Thomson's in 1925. Accomplished artists such as Toby Bains, Jimmy Crighton, Jack Glass, Peem Walker, not to mention the great artists working for the mighty Amalgamated Press at the time. A rather serious individual Dudley served his apprenticeship for over ten years before he got his big break with 'Oor Wullie' and 'The Broons'.



HERE'S BULLY BILLY BENSON COMING TO SEE OUR GUY FAWKES. YOU REMEMBER WE HOPED TO GET BILLY SAVED AT CAMP, BUT WE DIDN'T SUCCEED.
YES!
LOOK! HE'S HIDING SOMETHING BEHIND HIS BACK.
IT'S A HUGE CRACKER! HE'S THROWING IT INTO THE FIRE.
BOOM
LOOK OUT! THERE ARE BITS OF FIRE FLYING ALL OVER THE PLACE
SOME OF IT HAS SET BILLY ON FIRE — I'LL HAVE TO PUT THOSE FLAMES OUT.
TELEPHONE
I'LL DIAL 999 FOR THE AMBULANCE!
HOLD STILL, BILLY WHILE I SMOTHER THE FLAMES.

"WILLIAM & THE GUN-POWDER PLOT" (Continued on back page)

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1959 No. 107. 2d

HIDDEN STRENGTHS

From this point onward Dudley began his rise to superstar status within DC Thomson and the comic industry at large. His list of accomplishments at Thomson's is truly vast and between 1936 and his death in August 1969 to say he was prodigious would be an understatement! In reviewing his comic career there was, however, a side to Dudley that few saw. He was known as a religious man, but why he decided in mid 1956 to lend his talents to what could only be described as a 'fringe' religious organisation will likely forever remain a mystery. But lend his talents he did, on and off for the next 13 years right up to his death.

The Worldwide Evangelization Crusade, Youth Crusade (WEC) was a successor of a much older organization called the Heart of Africa Mission founded in 1913 that seems to have folded in 1937. During the first dark years of the Second World War the organisation resurrected itself as the WEC. An organisation with a difference, it was now specifically aimed at youth. Under the guidance of the first Editor, Mrs. Ena Pethybridge and her husband Bill (Auntie Ena and Uncle Bill as they referred to themselves) the first issue of *Young Warrior* hit the streets so to speak in November of 1941.

The Young Warrior was initially a monthly publication until promoted to bi-monthly status from September 1943. A story in the Nov - Dec issue from the early days of 1944 opens up with the following sentence. "Let me tell you how the little darkie boys and girls spent Christmas day in our part of the

world". This from a West African missionary somewhere in darkest Africa.

Filled with the milk of human kindness (something we could do with more of these days), it promoted the virtues of Jesus and encouraged the reader to 'give themselves to God'. Not only that but for 40/- (forty shillings, or two old pounds, to those readers under 40) you could attend a Young Warrior youth camp in Conway, or Perth or some other part of Britain.

Perhaps as a child Dudley had attended one of these camps when the organisation was in its previous reincarnation? Who knows?

ABOVE: JIMMY AND HIS MAGIC PATCH 1957

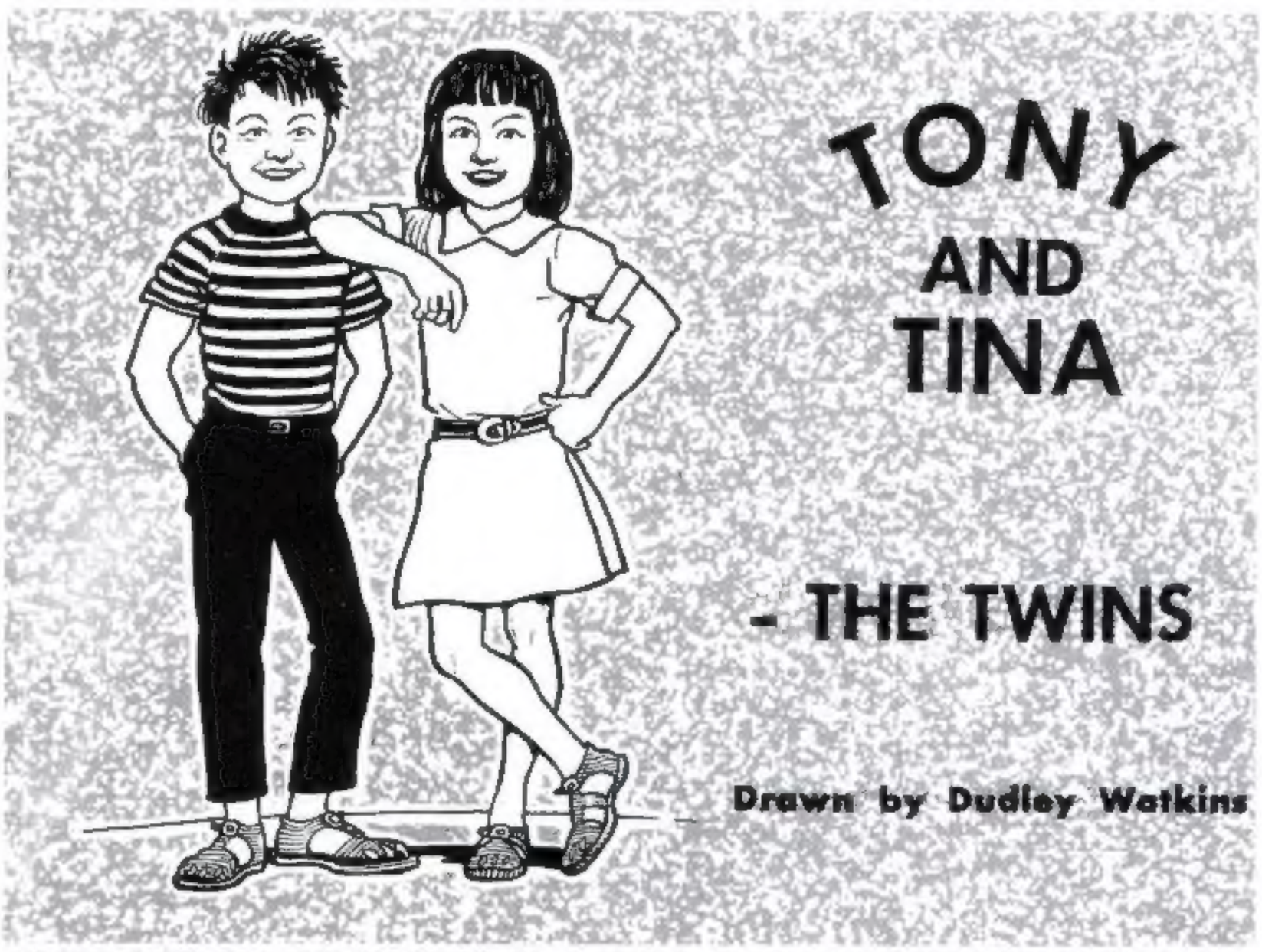
WARRIOR WATKINS

Clearly the life of an evangelist was not easy, as Auntie Ena moved from London to Swansea to Birmingham (Selly Oak and Edgbaston) over the space of ten years, where she remained for many years to come.

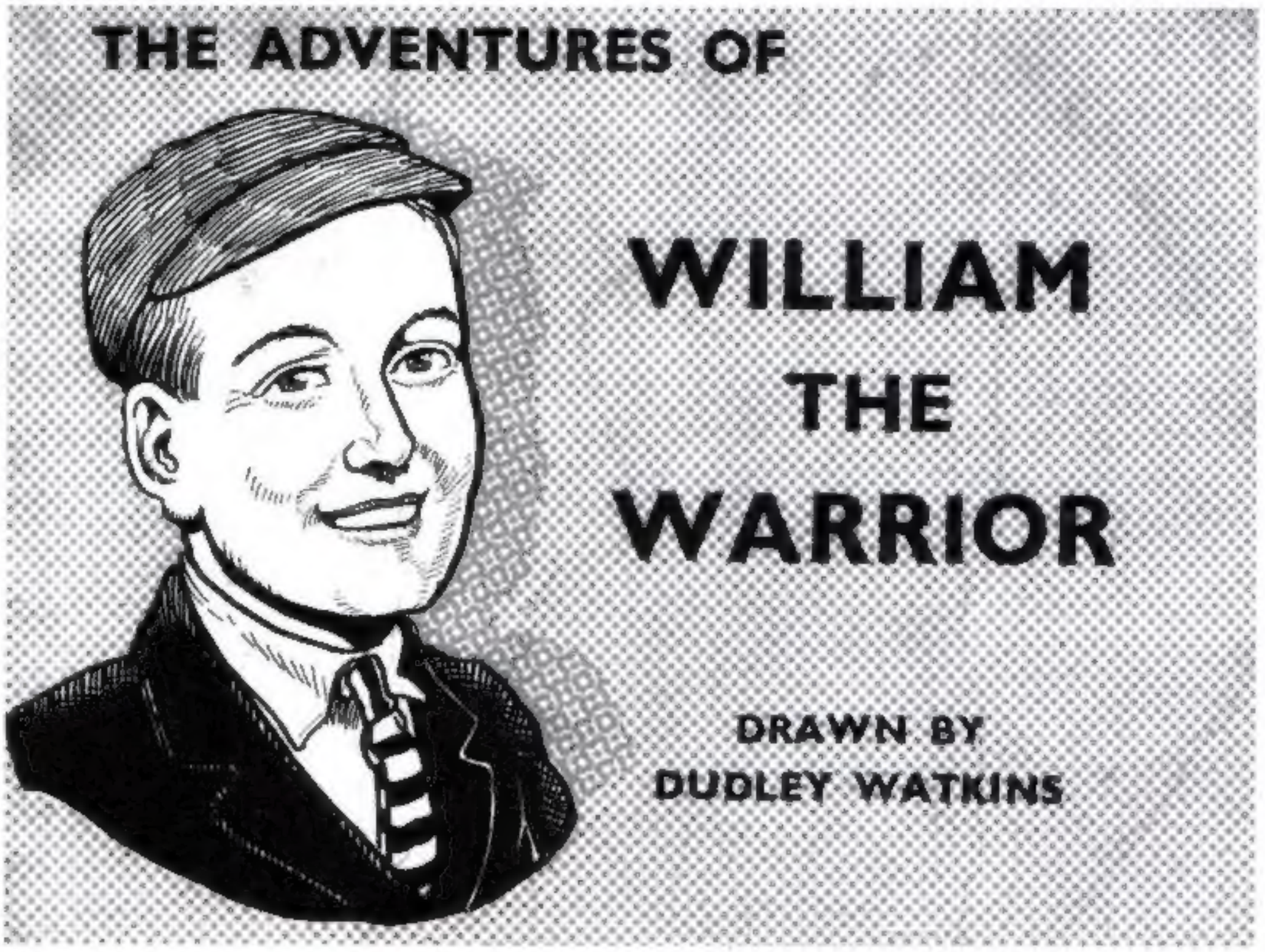
Dudley appeared on the scene in the July/August issue in 1956 with his first 'William the Warrior' strip. It was here where, after his mum calls him selfish in panel three, William ends up in panel six talking to Mr. Brown about becoming a young soldier of Jesus Christ and enlisting in his army. Six panels later and William is 'born again'.

No one knows for certain, but I suspect that Dudley probably penned these stories himself and he was clearly proud of them as like his Thomson work, he signed the first strip and many after that. This may have turned out to be a problem for him, which we will discuss later.

It's fascinating that this strip touches on so many things that plague our society today such as the evils of television, bullying and hooliganism. Dudley continued to draw 'William the Warrior' until sometime between June 1960 and Jan/February 1961. Although I don't have the issues, I believe he probably stopped, for whatever reason in Nov - Dec 1960. I say this because the collected works of William were published by the W.E.C. in August 1961 and then again in 1963, followed by a *William* puzzle book in 1964.



ABOVE & BELOW: THE FIRST TONY AND TINA & WILLIAM THE WARRIOR BOOKS



MYSTERY

The reason Dudley stopped could be many. Perhaps he just simply had too much work on his hands. Or perhaps pressure was exerted from Thomson's who may not have agreed with his religious beliefs and may have interceded since certainly Dudley had for whatever reason stopped signing his work by 1959. Dudley of course was one of very few Thomson artists who were given the privilege of signing

HEY! Want some inside information about Tony and Tina?

For the past five and a half years the Tony and Tina story has been drawn for Young Warrior by Mr Dudley Watkins. This has been a wonderful help to us, and during this time the circulation of the magazine has more than doubled, so that the story has been read by tens of thousands of boys and girls. Mr Watkins drew this story because he loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and he wanted boys and girls to love Him too. On August 20th he was called suddenly into the presence of the Lord Jesus whom he loved and served.

Mr. Watkins was a very busy man. Not only did he draw Tony and Tina (and before that, William the Warrior), but he drew lots of other strips which most of you have read and enjoyed - Desperate Dan, Lord Snooty and his pals, Biffo the Bear, Ginger, and (if you live in Scotland) Oor Wullie. In fact he had to draw eight strips a week for his firm! In spite of this he still found time to draw Tony and Tina each month! He did this because he wanted children to come to know the Lord Jesus as he did. They did! We had many reports of boys and girls coming to trust in the Lord Jesus through reading 'William the Warrior' or 'Tony & Tina'. While I was at camp this year a boy came into the camp especially to tell me that he had come to know the Lord Jesus through reading 'Tony & Tina'!

I wonder if you know the Lord Jesus? Is He your Saviour? Perhaps your answer is, "I don't know", so I will ask you another question. Have you asked the Lord Jesus to make you clean from your sin, and make you one of His children? If not, you don't know Him yet. Why not ask Him right now? The Lord Jesus wants to take away your sin, and there is nothing that would make Mrs Watkins happier than for this little paragraph to help you to know the Lord Jesus!

We are going to miss the help that Mr Watkins freely gave us each month with his drawings in Young Warrior - but don't worry! We have already made plans to continue with the Tony and Tina picture-strip on the front page. Look out for Tony and Tina next month!

P.S. The following books, drawn by Mr Watkins, can be obtained from the address below. Make sure you have read them all.

The Adventures of William the Warrior	9d.
Tony and Tina, the Twins	9d.
More about Tony and Tina	9d.

Get some for your pals too - then they may come to know the Lord Jesus as well! Order from the W.E.C. Youth crusade, Bulstrode, Gerrards Cross, Bucks, and include enough to cover the cost of postage (4d for one copy of each).

ANSWERS TO PUZZLES ON PAGE 4.

TREES MATCH 'EM: 1.h,Gen2.17. 2.d,Gen2.9. 3.g,Lk 19.4. 4.c,Ps 104.16. 5.a,2.Sam18.9-15. 7.f,Matt21.19. 8.e.

MISSING LETTERS MESSAGE: Seek the Lord.

ABOVE: THE KING IS DEAD – LONG LIVE THE KING. A RARE EXAMPLE OF THE DEATH OF A COMIC ARTIST BEING ANNOUNCED IN A PUBLICATION THEY WORKED ON – COMPLETE WITH A COUPLE OF COMMERCIALS. BELOW: WILLIAM FROM 1959.

FIVE MINUTES LATER
YOUR COAT PUT THE FLAMES OUT JUST IN TIME, WILLIAM
HE COULD HAVE BEEN BURNT TO DEATH!
IN HOSPITAL
YOU SAVED MY LIFE, WILLIAM, AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU.
OH! THAT'S ALL RIGHT, BILLY.
BUT TALKING ABOUT SAVING LIVES, WHAT ABOUT BEING SAVED FROM HELL AND RECEIVING ETERNAL LIFE? YOU KNOW WHO'S MADE THAT POSSIBLE, DON'T YOU?
YES! THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.
DO YOU WANT HIM TO SAVE YOU, BILLY?
I DO, WILLIAM.
GOOD! WELL, LET'S PRAY TO JESUS. REMEMBER HE'S HERE!! HE'S EVEN KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART NOW.
O LORD JESUS! I'M A BAD SINNER AND I DON'T DESERVE TO BE SAVED BUT—
—BUT I OPEN MY HEART'S DOOR WIDE OPEN TO YOU, COME IN PLEASE-
YES, THE BIBLE SAYS – CHRIST SHALL DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH
FIVE MINUTES LATER
I'VE GOT A WONDERFUL JOY IN MY HEART NOW, WILLIAM. I'M SAVED, I KNOW IT
YOU CERTAINLY ARE, BILLY. THANKS BE TO GOD.

their own work in those early days.

Furthermore, Dudley had been allowed to work from home, again an honour given to very few Thomson staff artists. My own theory, however, is that it was the new editors who brought about the change.

In 1960 'Auntie Mavis and Uncle Ken' suddenly appear, still in Birmingham and with the printing now shifted to McDougall and Marshall Ltd. of Birmingham.

The arrival of Auntie Mavis and Uncle Ken had brought other changes to the magazine: competition for Dudley.

Up until then Dudley's William had stood head and shoulders above the other strip and spot illustration dross that padded the thin magazine. The new editors had, however, chosen to publish additional strips produced by another evangelical crusade called the David C Cook foundation.

This organisation dated back to 1870 and had begun using religious strips in its magazines on 26 December 1943. Starting off with a strip called 'Tellus' the young Roman Christian which was first published in Sunday School papers such as *What To Do?*, *Boys' World* and *Girls Companion* before merging under the auspices of writer Joseph Hughes Newton into a single entity in 1949 called *The Sunday Pix*.

ARTFUL

The artwork for the new magazine was predominately provided by the Al Stenzel studios using artists such as Brinton Turkle, Bob Magnusen, and the late great Irv Novick (all Scandinavians?).

Tellus was originally drawn by Joseph Wirt Tillotson before handing over the reins to Andre LeBlanc.

LeBlanc was no stranger to comics having assisted Will Eisner on 'The Spirit' and Sy Barry on 'The Phantom' with bylines for his work on 'Flash Gordon' and 'Rex Morgan MD'. He achieved international fame for his work on *The Picture Bible*.

Irv Novick began his career with Harry Chesler's studio before joining MLJ where he is credited with creating the iconic American super hero The Shield. Later, after a stint in advertising and freelancing, presumably when he did work for Al Stenzel he returned to the comics working for DC Comics until retiring in the 1990's.

DUDLEY DOUBTS?

Perhaps with such esteemed competition Dudley felt his services were no longer required. Whatever the case Dudley returned to *Young Warrior* in July/August 1964 with a new strip called 'Tony and Tina - The Twins' and with no sign of 'William the Warrior' who had presumably fought his last battle.

The arrival of this new strip was heralded with a large advertisement in the May/June issue of the magazine. Auntie Mavis and Uncle Ken lauded Dudley's return and encouraged the children to get their friends to order copies, stating boldly that the new strip 'will be as exciting as 'William the Warrior' ever was. The new strip grabbed the whole of the front page and dominated the magazine, with the American competition staying on the back pages.

I suppose it is no coincidence that William bares more than a strong resemblance to one of Dudley's long string of iconic characters, namely 'Jimmy and his Magic Patch'. Jimmy was a very popular character at the time that

William was introduced to the readership of *The Young Warrior*.

Jimmy was an ongoing series in 1956/57 which ended in 1959 about the same time William ended in *The Young Warrior*. Coincidence? I don't suppose we will ever know.

ONWARD

Despite the introduction of 'Uncle Chris' (Scott) in 1967, 'Tony and Tina' remained part of the magazine until Dudley's death in August 1969. Over those five years the twins evolved from clean cut children into young adolescents mixing with mini-skirted young girls and Beatle-mopped young men.

The last 'Tony and Tina' strip appeared in *Young Warrior* November 1969, three months after Dudley's death in August.

I believe (but not certain) that *Young Warrior* had become a monthly publication with the return of 'Tony and Tina' adding yet another 12 panel full-page strip to Dudley's monthly workload.

It's always amazed me how many top comic book artists, particularly humour artists, died literally at their board at a relatively young age. Watkins was in his early sixties when he died, as was Davy Law. Others who went early include Bob Nixon, John Geering, Ken Reid, and the great Roy Wilson.

Perhaps the pressure of constant deadlines had a serious impact on their long term health outcomes. It is rumoured that one artist used to put his foot in a bucket of cold water when he was pulling an all-nighter.

DUDLEY DOUBLE

I have yet to see any of the 'Tony and Tina' strips signed by Dudley but its popularity is undeniable. In Dudley's obituary Uncle Chris lauds the doubling of the circulation of the magazine since 'Tony and Tina' began. So popular was the strip that it, too, was reprinted into little volumes – all for 9d!

As the 'Obituary' says, they made provisions to continue the 'Tony and Tina' strip with a new artist, but to be fair he just didn't compare with Dudley. So in January 1970 'Tony and Tina', in an ironic twist of fate became 'Our Gang', one of Dudley's earliest strips in the first edition of the *Dandy* and a forerunner of The *Beano*'s 'Lord Snooty and his Pals'.

BELIEF

Clearly one has to wonder what it was that drove Dudley Watkins to an early grave at the age of just 62. There is no doubt that Dudley was certainly earnest in his beliefs.

Perhaps as many surmise it was the pressure of all of the work he did for Thomson's. As his obituary says, 'Tony and Tina' was one of eight strips Dudley was working on at the time. Perhaps a greater power decided that it was time for the old evangelical crusader to stop being a warrior and hang up his pencil.

Whatever the case, like the consummate professional he was, Dudley died at his board. Though there have been many great artists since, I think it is fair to say that we will never see his like again. ●

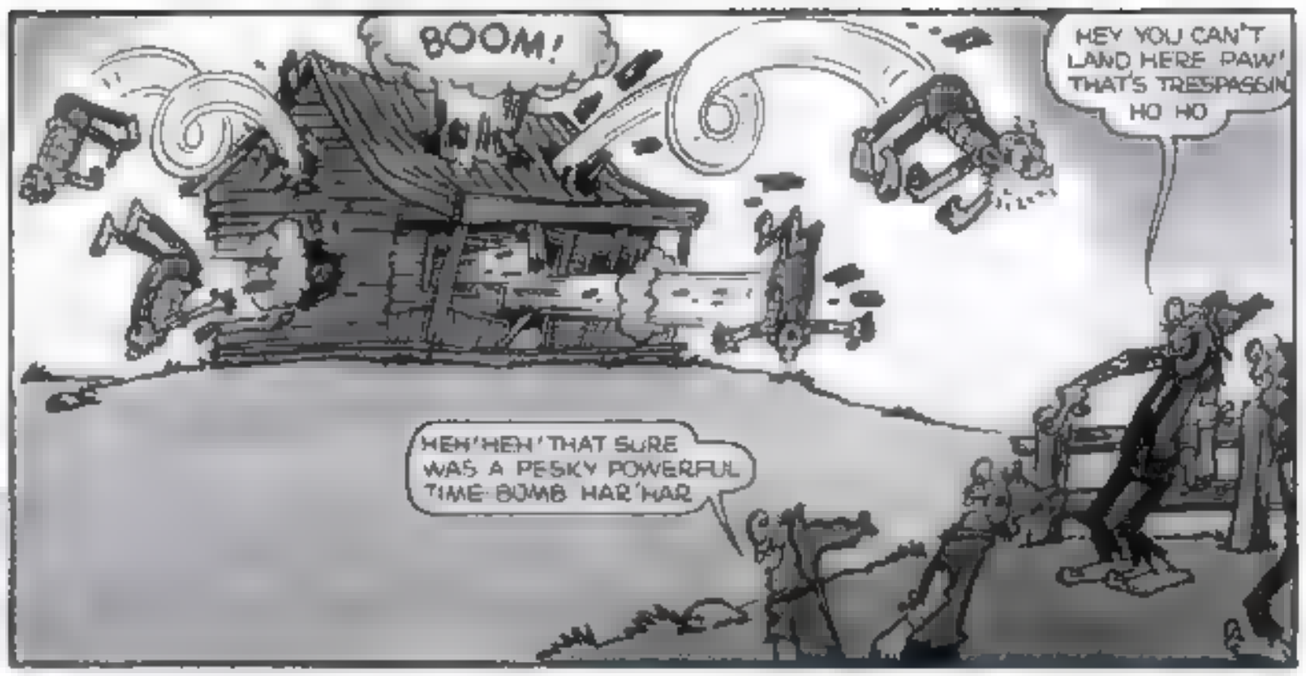
© Peter Hansen Vancouver 2008

WILLIAM! LOOK AT THE TIME - 11 O'CLOCK! GO TO BED AT ONCE
OH! MUM, I'M WATCHING THIS CRIME STORY
I HAVEN'T READ MY CHAPTER OF THE BIBLE TO DAY
TOO LATE NOW, ANYWAY I'M TOO TIRED
I HAVEN'T SAID MY PRAYERS EITHER - I'M SO SLEEPY! IT'S SITTING UP FOR THAT CRIME STORY THAT'S DONE IT!
NEXT MORNING
WILLIAM! GET UP! YOU'LL BE LATE FOR SCHOOL. YOU'VE SLEPT IN.
OH! MUM
AT SCHOOL
OH! I FORGOT TO PRAY THIS MORNING. I WAS IN SUCH A RUSH! I CAN'T CONCENTRATE ON THIS SUM EITHER - I'D BETTER JUST COPY PETERS
AT THE YOUNG WARRIOR MEETING
WHAT! NO WILLIAM TONIGHT? IS HE ILL?
I DON'T THINK SO. I'LL SEE HIM TOMORROW

ABOVE: THE EVILS OF TV

AT WILLIAM'S
WE MISSED YOU AT THE YOUNG WARRIORS LAST NIGHT, WILLIAM
SORRY, BUT THE T V WAS SO GOOD THEN I HAD TO DO MY HOMEWORK AS WELL
NEXT DAY
HULLO! PETER! ARE YOU AFTER ME AGAIN? I THINK I'VE SORT OF LOST INTEREST IN THE WARRIORS
OH WILLIAM! THIS IS TERRIBLE! NOT YOU SURELY.
TALKING ABOUT WILLIAM, I THINK I'VE BEEN GETTING A BIT SLACK MYSELF
I HAVEN'T BEEN PRAYING SO MUCH EITHER
GOOD SLIDE THIS.
WHY, YOU'VE SPUN RIGHT ROUND ON THE SLIDE - YOU'LL COME A CROPPER
YES! I'M SLIDING BACKWARDS
THAT'S WHAT WILLIAM'S DOING - BACKSLIDING!
HA HA HA! - YOU'VE COME A CROPPER WITH BACKSLIDING!
CRACK
OUCH!
MAKES YOU THINK DOESN'T IT? LET'S PRAY FOR OLD WILLIAM BEFORE HE COMES A CROPPER
O LORD PLEASE STOP WILLIAM BACKSLIDING GET HIM TO CLIMB UP HILL AGAIN TOWARDS THEE FOR JESUS SAKE AMEN

ABOVE: MORE EVILS OF TV



BY DAVID ROBINSON

My comics morning, as far as I can recall, didn't fall on a Saturday. I was a *Beezer* reader and I'm fairly sure that copies of the late, lamented giant comic appeared during the week in 1950s Kettering. They rested in tempting piles, either on the counter of our local newsagent (unforgivably now just an ordinary house), or balanced on what I seem to remember as drinks crates (nothing stronger than fizzy drinks like Corona or She!) accompanied by that all-important aroma of fresh print.

As I tentatively eased apart the tabloid pages, the imagined sound of distant gunfire ricocheted back and forth, as bullets zipped hither and thither across the so-named Happy Valley and I was again subjected to my weekly prescribed dose of... 'The Hillys and the Billys'.

A trawl of the internet reveals little about this underrated strip. 'Two feuding hillbilly families,' it tells us. 'Surprisingly violent, with the families eager to shoot each other with shotguns, even to the point of co-operating in order to steal guns from the sheriff.'

That sort of encapsulates it (although the writer of that statement could have glanced at simply one episode and drawn that same conclusion; but these few lines do little justice to the conceptual and artistic excellence of a definitive British strip of that period.

In terms of the eternal conflict between the eponymous redneck households, one is reminded of the irrepressible 'Spy vs. Spy', originally drawn for America's *Mad* magazine by late Cuban exile Antonio Prohias. The opposing sides are distinguished by their apparel; sometimes one entity wins, sometimes the other and sometimes both lose, either to the aforementioned local sheriff (Hilly Billys) or to a mysterious, third, feminine character (Spies).

I personally always rooted for the Hillys over the darker-shirted Billys, but this simply points out a psychological leaning. I also prefer the White Spy to his Black adversary, and this light-over-dark bias persists in all such conflicts.

BEGINNINGS

D. C. Thomson launched the *Beezer* in 1956 as the slightly-younger sister of the equally-excellent *Topper*: both were roughly A3-sized publications, twice as big as some other comics. Each boasted strips, stories and what the editors grandly called 'colour plates': full-page, single-panel items like Leo Baxendale's underrated 'The Banana Bunch' (before that evolved to strip format).

Our anti-hero feuding families began on the black-printed pages with a second colour (always red, as far as I recall; although more recent printings have used more exotic versions, like green). Then, one week, Oh, Joy! due to a swap-around (placing Baxendale on the important back cover, I believe), my favourite fighting family now appeared in glorious technarama! The Hillys' shirts were generally yellow, the Billys' red.

GEORGE MARTIN (1923-1994)

A Brief History and Stripography by Ray Moore

George Martin began his life as a cartoonist in the years immediately following World War II when, while working as a telephone reporter for the Press Association, he supplied cartoons for magazines such as Punch *and* Lilliput.

In 1950, he sent some samples of his work to publishers D C Thomson in Dundee in the hope that they might be able to provide him with work in any of their adult magazines or children's picture papers. As a result he was contacted by R D Low, Thomson's comic strip supremo, and offered work on a new strip to be titled 'King Gussie – his royal flyness' for the firm's magazine-cum-newspaper, The People's Journal.

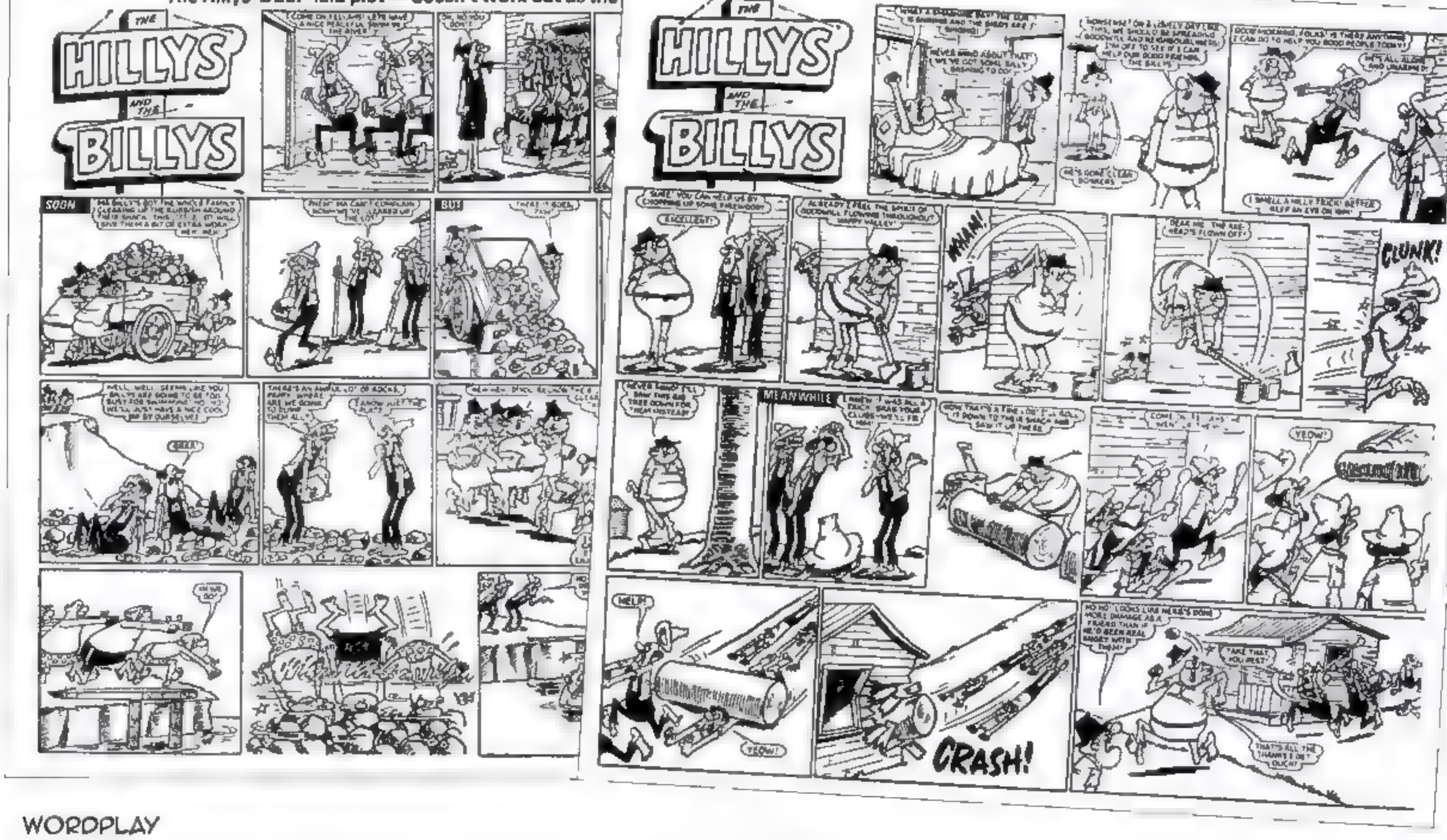
In the early 1950s, whilst continuing to cartoon part-time, George soldiered on with his 'day job' for the Press Association until in 1953 a confluence of events allowed him to become a full-time comic artist. Firstly, he convinced his day-time employers the PA to syndicate a 'laugh at life' strip he had devised titled 'Bunion'. This was soon followed by a sporting counterpart 'Stimey'. These strips proved so successful that George would write and draw both for the rest of his life.

Secondly, he received a call from Thomson's to say that they were expanding their children's comic line with a new tabloid paper to be titled The Topper *and that they would like him to be involved.*

From this point on the balance of George's working life was set as 'Bunion', 'Stimey' and a whole host of comic characters for the Thomson comic papers flowed from his pen. His output for Thomson being all the more remarkable when you consider that in a good many instances he scripted the work he supplied as well as drawing it. This was particularly true in his work for The Dandy *and* The Topper *and including some of his most successful and long-running strips such as 'Greedy Pigg' in* The Dandy *and George's own all-time favourite amongst his vast comic output, 'Send for Kelly' in* The Topper.

Each Wednesday George would make the journey from his home in Bexleyheath in Kent to the Thomson offices in London with that week's strips for transportation to the editorial offices in Dundee. Despite an output which sometimes ran to as many as six strips per week he rarely, if ever, missed a deadline.

As an artist he was a consummate professional with a deft, clean line to his work that only a natural cartoonist possesses and, in over forty years of producing comic strips, that line never wavered either to the rigours of producing so much or to advancing years. But then George Martin was



WORDPLAY

Editors were careful in those days (not to suggest that they're not, now!). When you think about it, spelling them 'Hillies' and 'Billies' might have been more grammatical, but also less easy on the eye.

The title is patently a play on the term hillbilly, regarded in the 1950s as a generic term for a stereotypical country person (and American country music was originally called 'hillbilly music', even by its fans, until the 1950s.). This view has been exacerbated by representations in film (Ma and Pa Kettle in comedic movies of the '40s and '50s) and TV (*The Beverly Hillbillies*, begun in the '60s).

And, indeed, in comics and cartoons: the lifestyle of the Ozark Mountains was gently parodied by Al Capp in the US comic strip 'Li'l Abner', later adapted for Broadway and Hollywood. James Dickey's 1970 novel *Deliverance*, famously filmed, includes sociopathic hillbillies. The Arkansas Chuggabug in *Wacky Races* and 'The Hillbilly Bears' feature in animated TV from Hanna-Barbera. Politically correct 21st Century Britain might call the overall portrayal of Hillbillies (as naive, unattractive hicks) derogatory; and it was, when the nickname was coined to refer to people dwelling in remote, mountainous areas of North America.

TAKIN' TO THE HILLS

So how do our Hillys and Billys pan out against this background? Sartorially, they fit the mould, with battered hats – a cross between a Stetson and a trilby – and patched knees in baggy dungarees that also display

ebullient by nature and found an innate joy in producing comic strips that never seemed to diminish. He thought being a comic artist was a " wonderful job; and that, if he could, he would quite happily do it until he was ninety!"

Sadly, however, George didn't make it that far as, following hospitalisation for a kidney ailment, he died, quite unexpectedly, in Jan 1994 aged 70 and with his passing the Thomson comics lost one of their most talented and reliable mainstays.

Thomson Stripography

What follows is a list of George Martin's output for the comics of DC Thomson. Other than his syndicated work for newspapers, eg 'Bunion', he rarely provided comic strips for other publishers ('Super Nan' for *TV Comic* being the single example that comes to mind). Strips are listed chronologically as they first appeared for each comic title.

The Dandy (1952-1988)

Wiley Smiley – the jungle joker, Robinson and his dog Crusoe, Mr Mutt, Jammy Mr Sammy, Sunny Boy – he's a bright spark, Greedy Pigg, Claude Hopper, Desparate Dawg, Izzy Skint (you bet he is!), Jolly Roger, Comic Cuts.

The Topper (1953-1990)

Smart Art, Captain Bungle, King Gussie, Julius Cheeser, Send for Kelly, Arty, Old Batty, Ali Babble, The Bright Boys, Andy Ladd, Ali and his Magic Carpet, Jiffy and the Glyphs, Super Specs, Dreamboat Bill, Whistling Billy.

The Beezer (1956-1990)

Smart Alice, The Hillys and the Billys, Oliver's Travels, Merrie Hood and His Robbin Men, Young Sid – the copper's kid, Clockwise Cartoons, The Life and Times of Colonel Blink.

Beezer and Topper (1990-1993)

Blinky, Kelly – the defective detective.

Sparky (1976-1977)

The Planet of the Nirdles, Buzz (1973-1975), Calamity Kate, Top 'Tec.

Nutty (1980-1985)

Ethek Red, Sport's Fan, Jay. R. Hood, Starship Lollipop, Nip and Rip.

Hoot (1985-1986)

Comic Cuts.

Judy (1960-1962)

Janie B. Quick.

The boy's picture papers Hornet, Victor *and* Champ *each reprinted George Martin comic strips. Jammy Mr Sammy (*Hornet *– 1971), The Hillys and the Billys retitled The Ruffies and the Tuffies (*Victor *– 1971) and Send for Kelly/Old Batty (*Champ *– 1984), while another Thomson boy's picture paper Spike (1982) ran 'Stimey', George Martin's syndicated sports strip.*

stylised zigzag bottoms (do trousers ever actually wear, in that way?) Their speech is punctuated by 'Haw haws', 'Peskys' and dropped g's (as in 'Nuthin'').

The characters, particularly the younger male family members, come across as "slow" (more political incorrectness!). The two families are comparatively violent – although this is the 'funny violence' of Tom and Jerry and their descendants, Itchy and Scratchy in *The Simpsons*. We know that however many blasts of buckshot the protagonists receive from an opposing blunderbuss, the same family will reappear, uninjured, in the following week's episode.

It's actually the boys' names that interested me. Forenames like Luke, Jake, Nat and Zeke became, for me, definitive hillbilly names. It's only in years since that I realised that all of these are Biblical: as well as Gospel-writer Luke, the other three are Jacob, Nathaniel and Ezekiel respectively. One could assume there might also be Abe, Ben, Dan, Gabe, Jed, Joe, Ike, Matt, Nate, Sam, Zak and the rest lurking, somewhere.

MARTIN MYSTERY MAN

So why do the Hillys and the Billys appeal to me? They're not good-looking, and other off-putting attributes, including a weekly insistence on shooting the proverbial out of each other, are covered above.

The answer lies with a gentleman about whom I can write little because I know little. Wikipedia lists creators who worked for the *Beezer*, including Baxendale, Paddy Brennan, Tom Paterson, Bill Ritchie and the (gladly) ubiquitous Dudley D. Watkins. There is no mention of the Hill/Billys creator, who is now generally held to be George Martin. This is despite the fact that his work has been fairly prolific, including 'Bunion', a pantomime strip syndicated to local presses, which I was 'reading' in the Leicester evening paper for some years before twigging that this was the same Martin.

Martin has been seemingly modest about his abilities, which include an economy of line typical of Thomson comics from the era. His 'just right' depiction of the valley where the Hill/Billys ply their noisy trade has not been brought forward by his successors, who appear to lapse into sumptuous foliage in a perceived more-modern style).

Attempts to write to him and coax out biographical details in the 1980s were both greeted by postal silence.

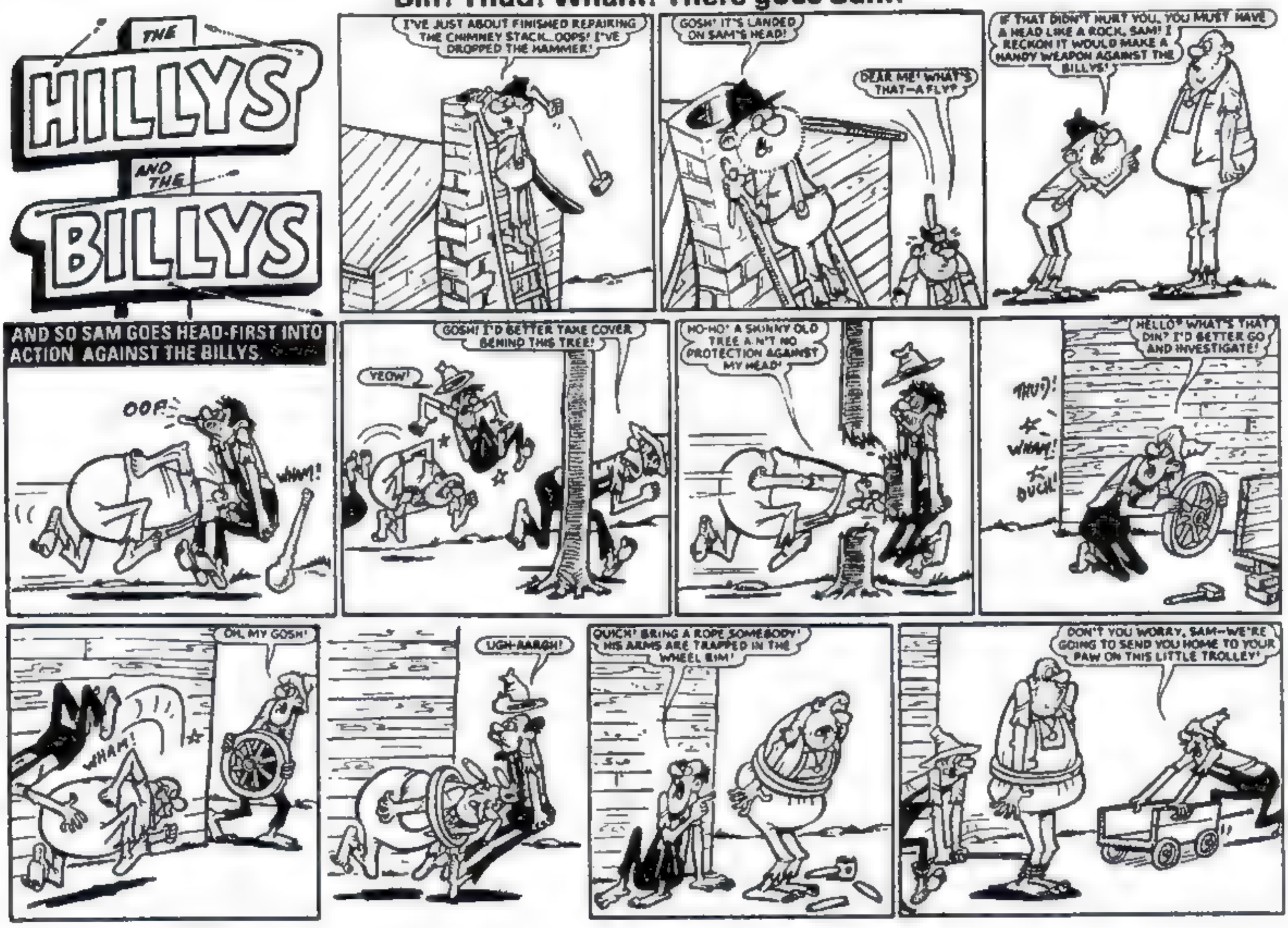
Martin's trademark visual style influences the way I draw a US backwoods shack to this day, replete with front veranda and side water-butt. It's hard to know what his influences were, but the strip is definitely set in America (as opposed to 'Desperate Dan', say, its western tones overlaid on to a Dundee street).

THE END?

On rare occasions when I go back to Kettering and reconsider the area where I lived until age 13, I realise that while some of the bricks, mortar and tarmac are the same, the backdrop to my childhood is painted only by the memory.

Memories of a homely local newsagent, that distinctive smell of freshly-printed comics, the way comic annuals 'felt' – and the sound of distant gunfire. ●

Biff! Thud! Wham! There goes Sam!


THE HILLYS AND THE BILLYS
I'VE JUST ABOUT FINISHED REPAIRING THE CHIMNEY STACK...OOPS! I'VE DROPPED THE HAMMER!
GOSH! IT'S LANDED ON SAM'S HEAD!
DEAR ME! WHAT'S THAT—A FLY?
IF THAT DIDN'T HURT YOU, YOU MUST HAVE A HEAD LIKE A ROCK, SAM! I RECKON IT WOULD MAKE A HANDY WEAPON AGAINST THE BILLYS!
AND SO SAM GOES HEAD-FIRST INTO ACTION AGAINST THE BILLYS.
OOF!
WHAM!
GOSH! I'D BETTER TAKE COVER BEHIND THIS TREE!
YEOW!
HO-HO! A SKINNY OLD TREE AIN'T NO PROTECTION AGAINST MY HEAD!
HELLO! WHAT'S THAT DIN? I'D BETTER GO AND INVESTIGATE!
THUD!
WHAM!
OUCH!
OH, MY GOSH!
WHAM!
UGH-AARGH!
QUICK! BRING A ROPE SOMEBODY! HIS ARMS ARE TRAPPED IN THE WHEEL RIM!
DON'T YOU WORRY, SAM—WE'RE GOING TO SEND YOU HOME TO YOUR PAW ON THIS LITTLE TROLLEY!

AIN'T LIFE JUST DANDY

THE HUMOUR COMIC LEGENDS OF DC THOMSON

BY TONY INGRAM

"A first edition of The Beano *has been sold for a record price of £12,000 after 'enormously fierce' bidding, an auction house said. The comic, dated July 30, 1938, is one of only twelve first editions known to exist . Comic Book Postal auctions, which sold the rare edition, said it beat the previous record for a Beano number one, which sold in 2002 for £7,565, and was also the most expensive British comic ever bought at auction."*

The above is part of a newspaper article which appeared several years ago (I'd imagine that record has been broken again by now), and it demonstrates pretty well just how much a part of the nation's collective consciousness certain cheap and cheerful disposable ephemera have become.

Don't see what I'm getting at? How about the fact that the writer feels no apparent need to explain quite what *The Beano* actually is?

For several generations of Britons, the word is self-explanatory. *The Beano* is *the Beano*; it's just there. The great British public knows, generally speaking, absolutely nothing about Green Lantern, Tin-Tin or even the X-Men, but there isn't anyone under 70 in the UK who couldn't tell you at least a couple of the characters from DC Thomson's classic *Beano* and *Dandy* comics.

We've all read them, and many of us also remember their various companion titles, *Topper*, *Sparky* and the rest. And yet, while US imports and even, in recent years, Thomson's own war comics like the immortal *Commando* are an endless source of fascination for collectors, the humour titles are considered to be of little interest (if they are considered at all) by all but a small but passionate minority.

COMICS FOR KIDS

So, why should this be the case? Well, the obvious answer would seem to be that they are humour titles, and more importantly, juvenile humour titles.

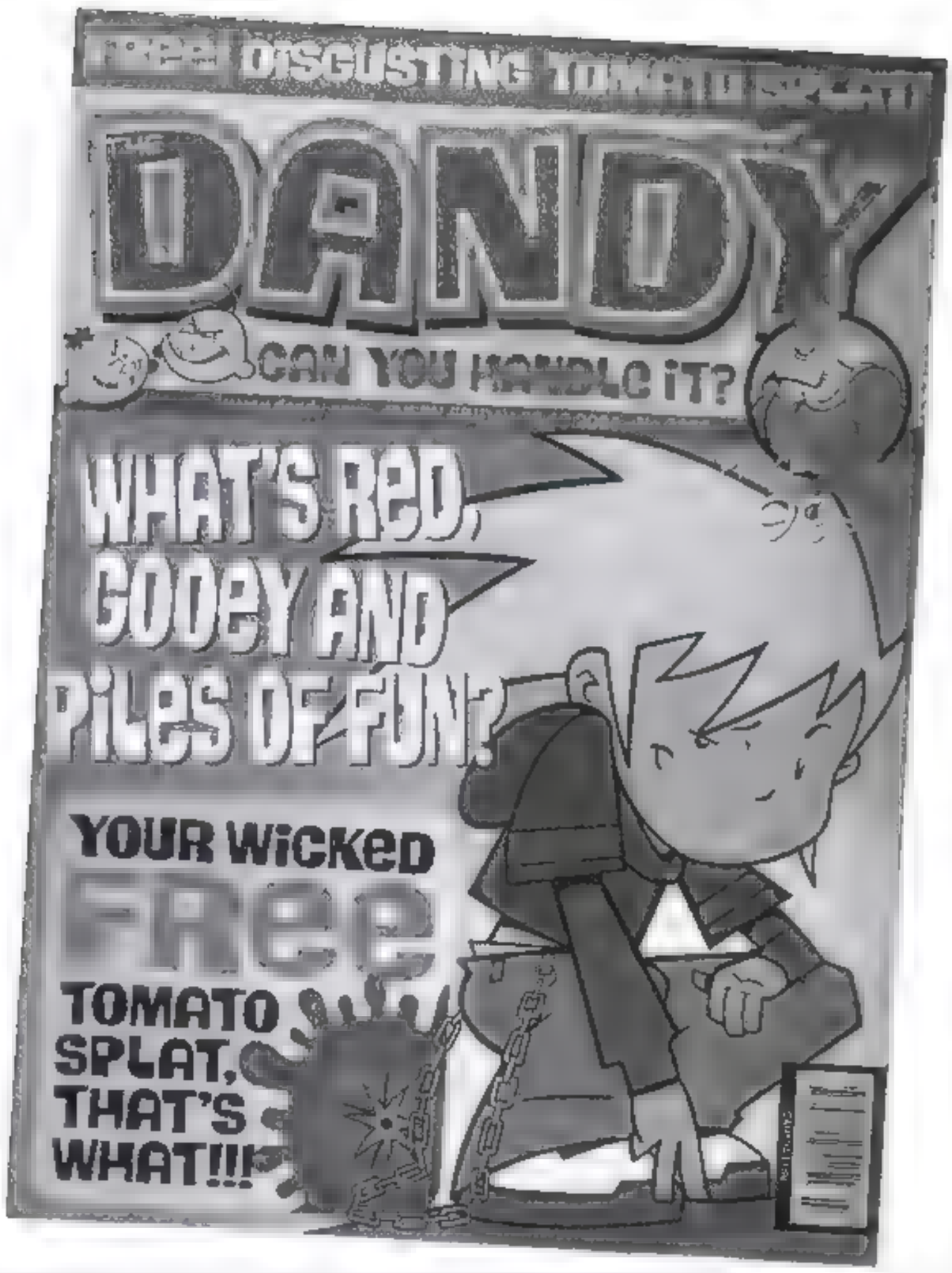
Comic fans and collectors are often notoriously defensive about their hobby, insisting that it's "not just for kids". I doubt many collectors have not at some point tried to convince a reluctant partner to read *Watchmen* or *V for Vendetta* in a desperate and doomed attempt to convince them that comics are real literature. No matter, the traditional British humour comic has always been so unquestionably aimed at kids that to defend having an interest in them once you're over 14 really means going that extra mile.

While I'll freely admit that these days my childhood pals the *Beano* and the *Dandy* seem just that little bit less stimulating than they did in about 1980, I must also admit to occasionally spending half an hour or so flicking through my old Seventies back issues with much of the same fascination that I did aged 10. That's because those old comics were actually often pretty good – and a lot cleverer and more imaginative than some people give them credit for.

It's not for nothing that these two titles have pretty much consistently outsold every other comic on the newsagent's shelves by a scarily high amount!

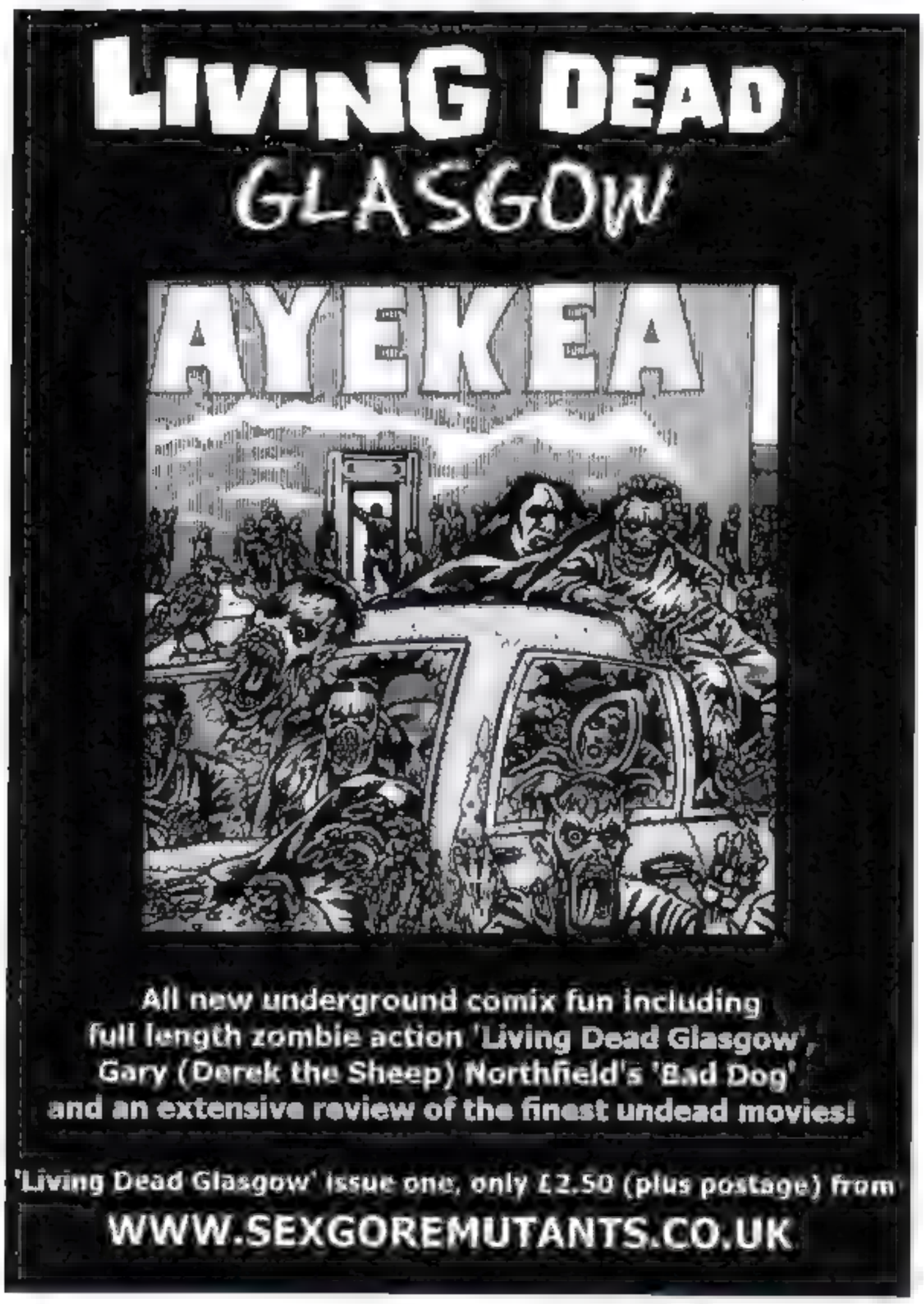
DANDY

This title has, of course, the distinction of being Britain's longest running comic title. It was very nearly the world's, though the American *Detective Comics*, predates it by nine months. *The Dandy*, however, has the highest number of consecutive regular issues. *The*



ABOVE: THE NEW LOOK DANDY - BEFORE IT CHANGED AGAIN AND AGAIN...

A D V E R T I S M E N T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Dandy has been in continuous publication since December 4 1937 and while characters like 'Smarty', 'Grandpa' and 'Freddy the Fearless Fly' have long since vanished into obscurity, at least one of that first issue's stars still appears today.

'Desperate Dan', co-created by the legendary Dudley D Watkins, based on a script by *Dandy* editorial staff, was for a long time probably the most famous of all British comics characters out in the non-comic reading world, though these days the *Beano*'s 'Dennis the Menace' has the edge on him in terms of popularity.

Dan's Wild West adventures in the curiously British seeming town of Cactusville, where red Post Boxes sit comfortably alongside sheriffs and marauding "Injuns" have a peculiarity all their own which has enthralled readers for over seventy years. Dan seems unlikely to be going anywhere anytime soon despite having been somewhat watered down over time. (Originally, Dan was a desperado; in these more PC days he isn't even allowed his six guns and spurs!)

For much of that time, 'Korky the Cat' – the Dandy's cover star for a staggering 47 years – was to be found alongside Dan, usually trying to put one over on the local copper and grab some illicit grub. In recent years the wily feline has sadly dropped out of sight.

For every Dan and Korky, the *Dandy* has of course had a dozen lesser-known characters, many of them worth noting. Allan Morley's ever-nosy 'Keyhole Kate', another of the comics founding line-up, continued to pry into other people's business with predictably amusing results for many years in both the *Dandy* and, later, the *Sparky* comic.

Dandy 272 (1944) introduced us to 'The Amazing Mr X', the first British costumed crimefighter (courtesy of Jack Glass) while 1945 saw the coming of the unbeatable 'Black Bob', a sheepdog whose intelligence and resourcefulness would have made Lassie green with envy. Bob, like several of his contemporaries, even graduated to his own title – the long-running Black Bob Album series!

Dudley D Watkins gave us 'Danny Longlegs' (though some might wish he hadn't) while David Law provided the military madness of 'Corporal Clott' from 1960.

Bill Holroyd produced the "amazing metal schoolboy", 'Brassneck' from 1964 (originally a science fiction adventure story of sorts, later a comedy, 'Brassneck' was one of *Dandy*'s oddest but most enduring characters).

There were zillions of zany and zestful characters:

'The Smasher' (an accident prone schoolboy)

'Desperate Dawg' (literally a doggie version of Dan)

The constantly tinkering 'Screwy Driver'

The permanently grubby 'Dirty Dick' (think *Just William*).

Ken Reid's wonderful, dynamite-obsessed Wild West joker 'Bing Bang Benny'

The ever-feuding 'Bully Beef and Chips'

The ever-feuding 'The Jocks and the Geordies'

Boarding school prankster 'Winker Watson' (a strip which sometimes seemed a bit less cartoony and more 'grown up' than the rest and maybe owed a debt to the likes of Anthony Buckeridge's Jennings books)

'Jack Silver' – oh, the list goes on...

Admittedly, some strips (like 'Monkey Bizness', about the misadventures of...er...some monkeys running a

LEFT: WHERE IT ALL STARTED... BASH STREETS KIDS, REPUTED TO BE BASED ON A SCHOOL SEEN FROM THE WINDOW OF THE OFFICE OF THE BEANO EDITOR.

business) were less successful than others. For every 'Monkey Bizness' or 'PC Big Ears', however, there's a 'Dirty Dick' or an 'Ali Ha-Ha' (Arabian Knights madness by Ken Reid) to make up for it.

With the *Dandy*'s absorption of lesser titles such as *Hoot* and *Nutty*, the granddaddy of British comics has been able to constantly strengthen its line-up with proven characters. Some of those characters have had a bit of weird history behind them. 'Cuddles', for example, was a malevolent baby created for *Nutty* in 1981, who was later retroactively declared to be the brother of the *Dandy*'s similar character, 'Dimples'; they're still going, as I type this.

And they got John Geering's superheroic Bananaman.

Sadly, in recent years the *Dandy*'s sales have dropped off, more so than the *Beano*'s. Maybe it's because *The Dandy* has always seemed somehow a little old-fashioned by comparison its 'sister'. In 2004, this led to the publishers revamping the title with a new logo (sacrilege!) and new, 'cooler' characters like 'Jak' and the annoying 'Ollie Fliptrick '(a skateboarder first introduced in 2002).

Dandy Xtreme came as something of a shock to long time readers, but its reinvention as part comic, part 'lifestyle magazine' for kids is merely the latest in a series of trials Britain's oldest comic has overcome over the years.

What a hullabaloo — Over a crossword clue!
WHEN THE BELL RINGS
WORK QUIETLY I HAVE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO DO
NOW I'LL SET ON WITH MY CROSSWORD PUZZLE
NOW WHAT IS A FOUR LETTER WORD MEAN NO 'MONKEY FUDGE'?
COME ON SNIFFY!
GOOD OLD WILFRED
QUIET THERE!
NUTS!
WHO SAID THAT?
DIVE FOR COVER!
COME ON! WHO SAID IT?
SO IT WAS YOU!
WELL, TAKE THESE!
SWEETS
THANKS, DANNY. SO IT WAS ONE OF THE ANSWERS IN MY CROSSWORD PUZZLE
PUT
NOW I CAN FINISH IT IN PEACE!
COME BACK!

BEANO

Dandy's sister title the *Beano* Comic (to give it its full title, shortened to just *The Beano* in 1950) is now the better known of the two. It began life eight months after *The Dandy* in July 1938.

Quite why the *Beano* has, since quite early on, had something of an edge over its older sibling it is difficult to say.

The Beano started out with relatively inoffensive strips such as its original cover star 'Big Eggo' the ostrich (one of *The Beano*'s longest serving characters) and Dudley D Watkins' super-rich 'Lord Snooty' (real name, Lord Marmaduke of Bunkerton). It later became home to a horde of characters so manic that no other comic of the time would have given them house room!

Other characters such as 'Pansy Potter the strongman's daughter' (Dec 1938) and 'Biffo the Bear' (watch out, Eggo! – he'll be the cover star from Jan 1948) were popular enough.

The various strips devised during the war years appealed to readers' patriotism. Sam Fair's 'Winken and Blinken' and 'Musso the Wop' (the latter based on Mussolini) kept the *Beano* chugging along at a right old pace. It wasn't until 1951, however, that the *Beano* celebrated the arrival of the character who would become inseparable from it in the minds of generations of school kids – 'Dennis the Menace'.

The first and greatest of a succession of pre-teen troublemakers who these days would be first in line for an ASBO, 'Dennis' was created by David Law and first

The Beano at War
ILLUSTRATING the great British ability to laugh in the face of adversity The Beano continued to pour out its fun-filled pages during the dark days of World War 2. However the wonderful jokes and stories were served up with a large helping of patriotism as the comic's characters tackled the Nazis in highly imaginative ways.
BEANO readers were encouraged to save paper for recycling, all in aid of the war effort. Paper shortages had already affected Beano readers, the comic went fortnightly, coming out on alternate weeks to the sister paper The Dandy. The page count had to go down as well, the Beano of April 1942 was reduced to 12 pages and stayed this way for the duration of the war.(Post war, in April 1947, the page count dropped to 10 as shortages bit hard.)
COME ON GIRLS! COME ON CHAPS! DOT HITLER ON THE NAPPER SAVE UP ALL YOUR LITTLE SCRAPS AND BE A "PAPER SCRAPPER"!
— Don't make paper aeroplanes with your old comics—
— Help to make REAL ONES →
SAVE WASTE PAPER
Adolf started off this war
But soon we'll stop his capers
If every British boy and girl
Keeps saving up WASTE PAPER!
IF HITLER HAD A MAGIC TELESCOPE WOULD HE SEE THIS?
IT'S UP TO YOU! SPEED OLD HITLER TO HIS GRAVE WITH ALL THE PAPER YOU CAN SAVE!
HOT! SAVE WASTE PAPER!
IT HELPS TO WIN THE WAR!

RIGHT: THE BEANO GOES TO WAR.

saw print in March 1951, initially in a half page strip in *Beano* 452.

He's virtually unrecognisable when compared to his modern incarnation (he didn't even get his trademark stripy jumper until 459, and didn't team up with his faithful canine companion Gnasher until 17 years later). What he did have was star quality and he caught the readers' imaginations more or less immediately.

In the years since his debut 'Dennis' has become one of British comics' handful of superstars, with his own fan club, annuals, a variety of menacing merchandising and, for a time, even his own TV cartoon show! (According to *Crikey!* Chum Nigel Parkinson Dennis will be the star of a bigger and better series in 2009.)

The appeal of 'Dennis' is obvious, of course – he gets away with things his fans never could, and is as feared and respected as they'd like to be.

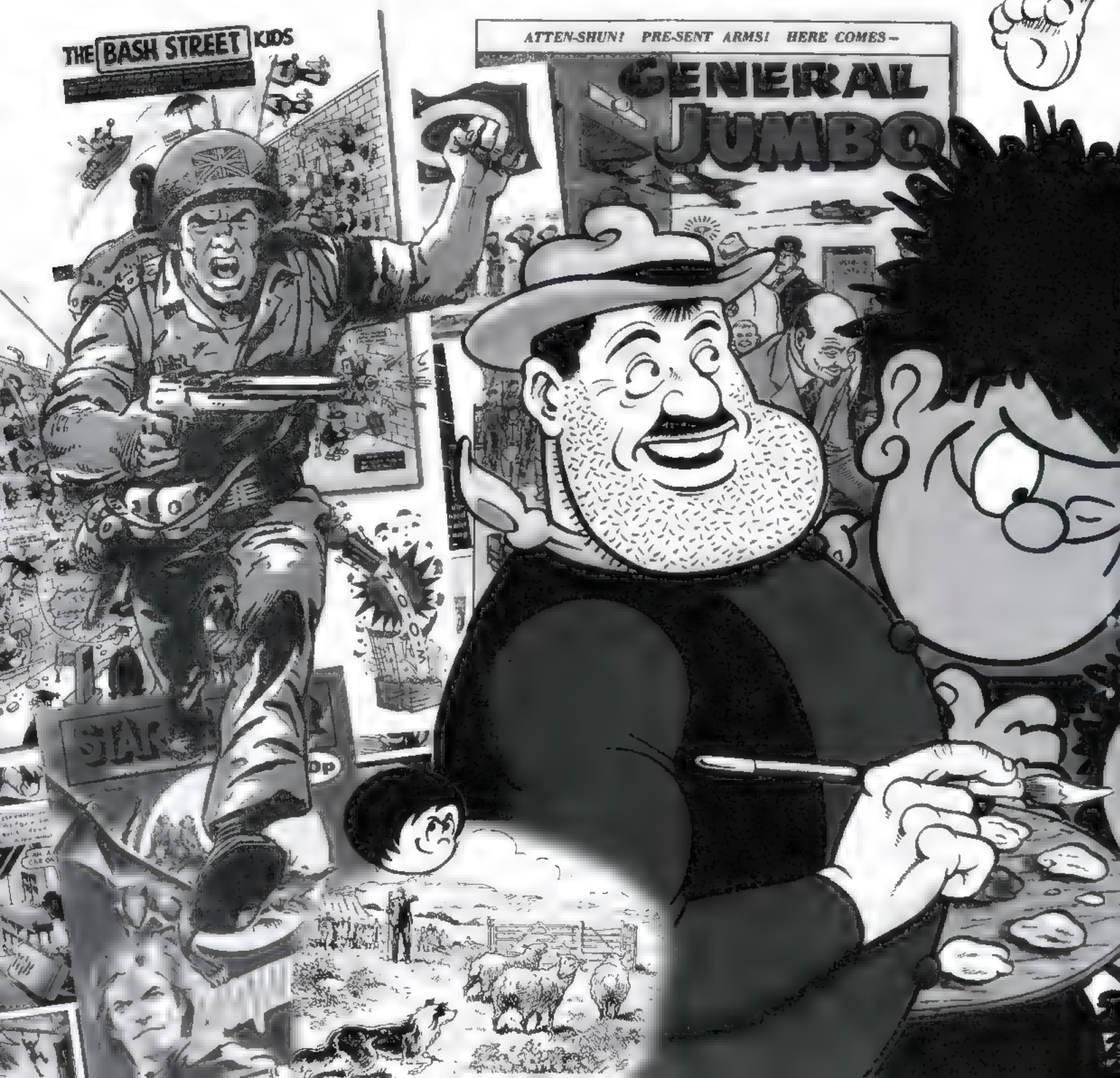
But you wouldn't want him living next door to you.

Probably a slightly better – or at least quieter – neighbour would be the irredeemably lazy and delightfully devious 'Roger the Dodger', created by Ken Reid in April 1953 (*Beano* 561).

Roger, a fiendishly intelligent individual, would put more effort into avoiding doing even the smallest of tasks than the tasks themselves would have required, just to prove that he could do it.

An inspiration to us all, Roger – who apparently writes his dodges up in bound volumes, his 'Dodge Books', for later reference – is walking proof that with a little ingenuity, almost any situation can be turned to one's advantage. Though oddly enough his dad never seems to appreciate this.

Also debuting in 1953 were work-shy Red Indian kid 'Little Plum' (586, 10 October) and 'Dennis the Menace's destructive yet curiously likeable female counterpart, 'Minnie the Minx' (596, 19 December). Both bothersome brats came from the pen of comics great Leo Baxendale.



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It was also Baxendale who in *Beano* 604 (13 Feb 1954) gave us the last of the title's icons, class IIB of Bash Street School, originally under the less than memorable title of 'When the Bell Rings'. By December 1956 (*Beano* 750) though, they were better known simply as 'The Bash Street Kids'.

More than fifty years on, Dennis, Roger, Minnie and the Kids are all still wreaking havoc on a regular basis while their more sedate forebears such as Eggo have long since retired. Evidence (if any were needed) that no matter how hard you try to engage their interest in more worthwhile topics, what most kids really want is to see stuff get smashed up.

Of course, *Beano* had its lesser characters, too. Comedy/adventure strips were popular for many years, like the rather strange 'Shipwrecked Circus' (1943) by Watkins, and the frankly bizarre 'Jimmy and his Magic Patch' (1944) by, er, Watkins, come to think of it.

Jimmy was one of the *Beano*'s more unlikely characters; a schoolboy who had a patch in the seat of his trousers which was made of an enchanted material, and which periodically yanked him through time. Why Jimmy only had the one pair of trousers and whether or not he ever washed them was never touched upon. Perhaps wisely. Watkins also drew 'Strang the Terrible' and 'The Adventures of the Strongest Man in the World' (*Beano* 240, 1944).

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September 1953 brought Paddy Brennan's 'General Jumbo' (about a kid with an army of amazing radio controlled toys – including fully functional tanks – built for him by a slightly deranged Professor), while 1967 gave us David Sutherland's superheroic 'Billy the Cat'.

Meanwhile, on the humour front Ken Reid first brought us ageing juvenile delinquent 'Grandpa' in July 1955. The strip lasting for decades, as did 'The 3 Bears', created by Baxendale in October 1960 (a family of ursine hillbillies permanently trying to steal food from Hank the storekeeper).

Reid's maritime madman 'Jonah', surfaced in March 1958; while Malcolm Judge's super-speedy 'Billy Whizz' arrived in May '64. 'The Bash St Kids' pets', 'Pup Parade' (doggy analogues of the various kids themselves) turned up in 1967, courtesy of Gordon Bell, and undersized wild west desperado 'Babyface Finlayson' began his criminal career courtesy of Ronald Spencer in 1972 (after a tryout in 'Little Plum's strip the previous year).

'Jack Flash', 'Ball Boy', 'Smudge' (the *Beano*'s answer to *Dandy*'s 'Dirty Dick'), the awful 'Danny's Nanny' (a baby whose nanny was a dog), 'Ivy the Terrible', 'Calamity James', 'Les Pretend' and many more have followed over the years.

Dennis the Menace's family has grown, with the arrival of pet pig Rasher in 1979, and later the arrival of a baby sister Bea in 1998. And of course, new characters are appearing all the time – in recent years, strips like 'Crazy for Daisy' (about the lovelorn Ernest and the scornful object of his affections) have proven as popular and enduring as 'Jonah' or 'The Numskulls' ever were.

As long as this continues, it seems likely the *Beano* will keep its position as the UK's best selling humour comic – though it's a shame that nowadays, there's little competition.

MAGIC COMIC

Thomson's third title was the short-lived *Magic Comic* – a title for younger readers that managed just 80 issues between July 1939 and January 1941, when wartime paper rationing speeded up its cancellation.

Evidently, cover star 'Koko the Pup' and his cohorts didn't have the staying power of *Beano* and *Dandy*'s lunatic characters, though 'Koko' did join forces with 'Big Eggo' the ostrich in a series of stories in the Beano Book (retitled *Magic Beano Book*) from 1943 – 1950.

TOPPER

More successful by far was the *Topper*, launched 7 February 1953. Often regarded nowadays as something of a poor relation to *Beano* and *Dandy*, the *Topper* and its later sister title, the *Beezer*, are actually two examples of British comics at their best, from an era when that was really saying something.

Topper always had a rather different feel than the older titles, though the overall tone changed slightly over the years. It seemed to be for a younger readership with strips such as 'Julius Cheeser' (1957 - a cat and mouse story) and 'Natty Jack' (1960 - a well-dressed fly!).

Later, the *Topper* became more sophisticated. There was an increase in the space devoted to adventure strips (mostly, in the '50s, by Dudley D Watkins and reprinted from *The People's Journal*). Comedy/adventure strips such as the memorable 'Whizzers from Oz' began to focus on fantasy and SF elements. There was even a slightly less juvenile feel to characters like 'Nick Kelly, Special Agent' (formerly 'Send for Kelly').

Topper's original and long serving cover star was 'Mickey the Monkey' (also by Watkins), though 'Send for Kelly', 'Danny's Tranny' (a kid with a magical radio) and 'Tricky Dicky' all held the slot for a time in later years.

In May 1986, 'Beryl the Peril' (David Law's answer to

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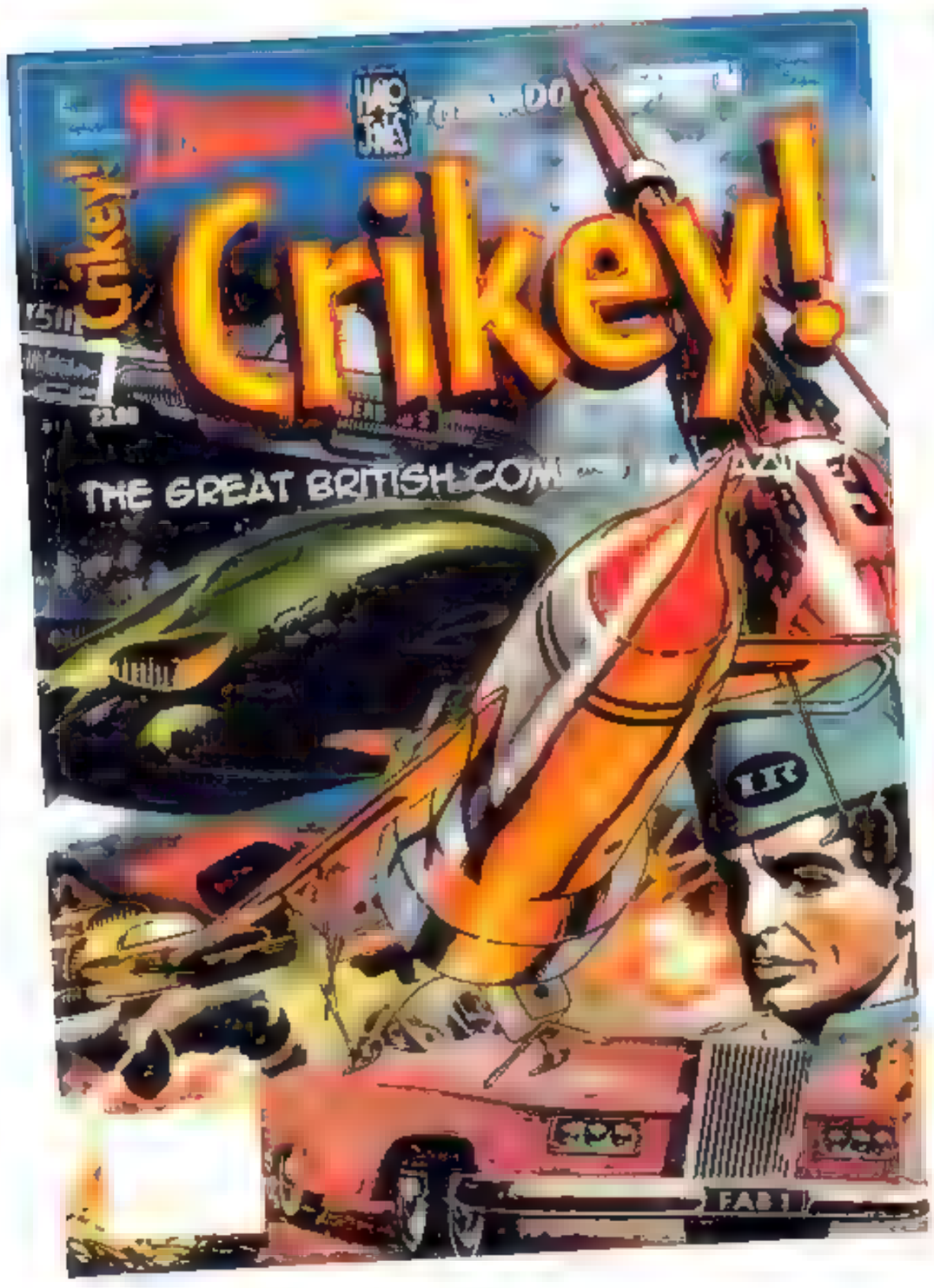

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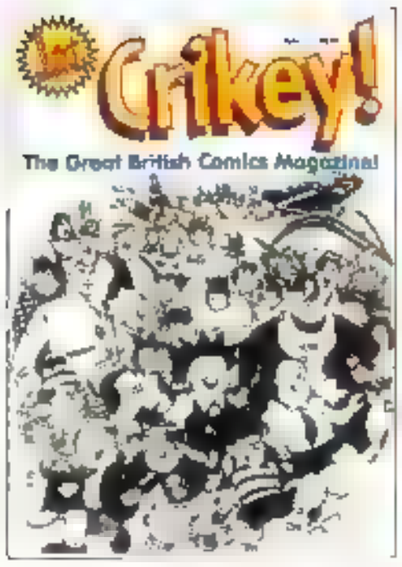

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Frank Bellamy
Overview of Misty comic
Wham!
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Zeg the Invincible (Daleks)
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(Lady Penelope)
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Smash
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Don Lawrence
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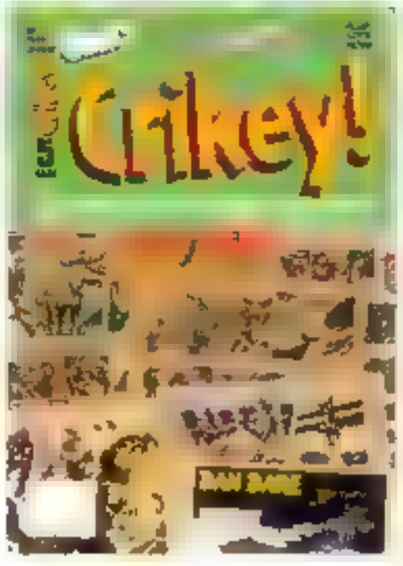

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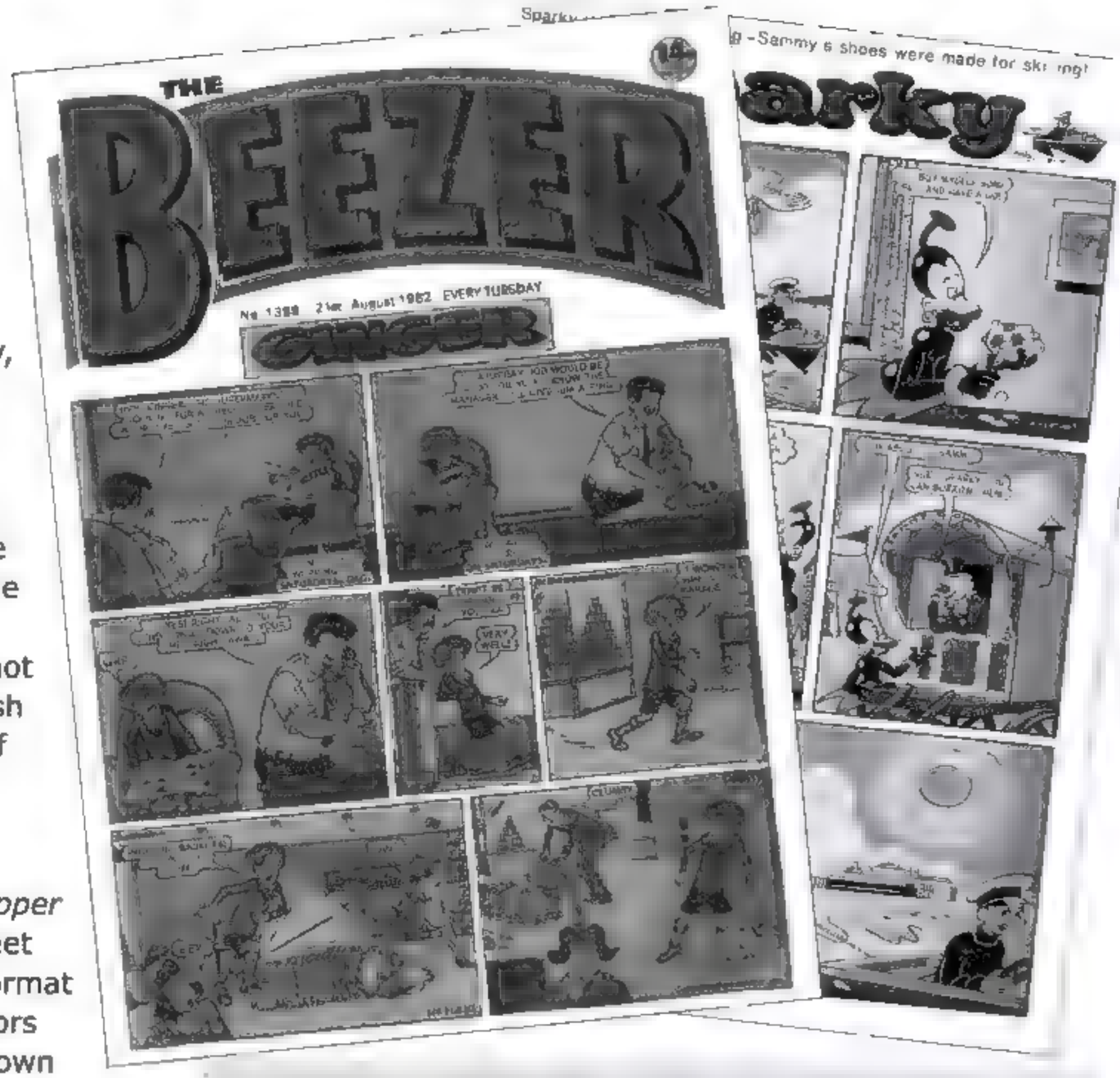
Warrior Magazine
Romeo Comic
Oink!
Frank Hampson
Gil Page Interview
Dan Dare
Commando Comic

Crikey! 6
(Special DCT issue!)
Our usual features plus
Super Cats & Orphan Brats
Happy Birthday Beano!
Dudley Watkins
Ain't Life just Dandy
Horspur
Warlord
Black Bob
Sparky

Beano's 'Minnie the Minx', and a Topper star since the first issue) took over and deservedly retained pride of place on the cover until *Topper* merged with *Beezer* in 1990.

Following the eventual demise of *Beezer* and *Topper*, 'Beryl' – heavily redesigned in later years – resurfaced in the *Dandy*. Sadly, other *Topper* stars like 'Tiny' (the world's biggest dog), 'Foxy' (a wily fox), 'Nancy' (a little girl always in trouble), 'Figaro' (a Mexican bandit), idiotic castaway 'Desert Island Dick', greedy goblin 'Splodge' and the imperialistic 'Captain Bungle' ("he lives in the jungle") haven't been seen since.

In 'Captain Bungle's case, this is perhaps not surprising as his bone wearing, pidgin English speaking natives are no longer the source of humour they might once have been.



ALMOST 25 YEARS LATER, GINGER IS STILL THE COVER STAR. THE REIGN OF SPARKY WAS RATHER MORE SHORT LIVED.

BEEZER

Of course, the main difference between *Topper* and *Beano* or *Dandy* was its larger broadsheet size rather than the usual A4. Though the format has since proven a pain for "serious" collectors (unfolded copies are hard to find), it went down well enough that in January 1956, a companion title was launched in the same format – *Beezer*.

The cover featured Dudley Watkins's 'Ginger', backed up by the likes of Allan Morley's 'Nosey Parker', Leo Baxendale's 'Banana Bunch' and Tom Bannister's 'Pop, Dick and Harry' (no relation to *Beano*'s 'Tom, Dick and Sally').

Later picking up strips like Banister's wonderful 'Colonel Blink', "the short sighted gink" (Nov 1958), Malcolm Judge's 'Badd Lads' (a trio of incompetent crooks, 1960), 'Saucy Sue' (a resourceful little girl), 'Baby Crockett', 'The Numskulls' and 'Young Sid the Copper's Kid', *The Beezer* delighted kids for 34 years before being cancelled along with *Topper* in September 1990.

The pair were merged and relaunched with the by now regular-sized *Beezer and Topper* #1 in the same month, but the combined title lasted only 153 issues to August 1993, though *Beezer* annuals continued to appear for a time.

SPARKY

The Sparky Comic arrived on 23 January 1965 and lasted until July 1977 before merging with *Topper*, a grand total of 652 issues, but it still provokes nostalgic affection in those who remember it.

Ron Spencer's 'Sparky', the title character in the early issues, would not be welcome in comics these days. 'Sparky' was a comedic African tribesman being no more PC than *Topper*'s 'Captain Bungle', but at the time he was easily as popular as his neighbours, including comic-hopping refugees 'Pansy Potter', 'Keyhole Kate' and 'Hungry Horace'.

There was a couple of lesser-known characters as well such as 'Dreamy Dave and Dozy Dora' and 'Joe Bann and his Big Banjo'. Later issues brought the fantastic, forever faceless, 'I-Spy'; the revolting but loveable lab experiment 'Thingummy Blob', 'Peter Piper' (whose Pan pipes could bring inanimate objects to life) 'Ali's Baba' (a toddler protected by a genie), the dozy coppers of 'L Cars', the 'Sparky People' (supposedly the editorial team), dog and cat team 'Puss an' Boots' and many more.

Though mostly forgotten now, I surely cannot be the only *Sparky* fan who'd love to see 'I-Spy' or those bandaged weirdoes from 'Some Mummies Do 'Ave 'Em' resurrected somewhere?

BUZZ

Buzz was another broadsheet title. It lasted just 103 issues from January 1973-January 1975 before merging with *Topper*, though a few of its stars – 'Nobby', the luckless thief 'Fred the Flop' and the interestingly surreal 'Jimmy Jinx and what he thinks' (about a boy with a possibly imaginary angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other) lasted for years in their new home.

CRACKER

Cracker seems to provoke complete indifference with comic fans today – possibly because no one seems to have ever heard of it!

Launched in January 1975, it lasted only until

DESPERATE DAN

September '76 before being merged with *Beezer*, a shame since it actually had a lot going for it. Among its line-up were the hilarious (though now rather dubious) 'Young Foo the Kung Fu Kid' (a slant-eyed schoolboy whose dialogue was shown in both English and something purporting to be Chinese), the bumbling 'Simple Spyman', 'Little 'Orror' and Barrie Appleby's brilliant 'Curly's Commandos' – not to mention the superheroic 'Iron Hand'.

Possibly, *Cracker* bit the dust because no one could stand its supremely irritating 'host' – spiky haired schoolboy Sammy!

PLUG

Another title virtually unknown these days is *Plug*, launched on September 26 1977 and starring the ugliest member of the *Beano*'s Bash Street Kids in solo misadventures.

Curiously, *Plug* did not appear in either the standard A4 format or the broadsheet format but in a size somewhere in-between, and with a more glossy and expensive look.

BELOW: NUTTY'S STEEVIE STAR AND THE BEANO' S PLUG FROM THE BASH STREET KIDS GET THEIR OWN STRIP.

STEEVIE STAR
AS KENNY EVEREST IN "The Kenny Everest Video Show"
HELLO!
EXIT
No. 28 – April 1st, 1978. Every Saturday
FUN PLUG
ON YOUR POCKET!
PLUG IS ALWAYS ON THE BALL!

It also had a highly distinctive and unusual visual style such as Graham Allen's 'Digby the Human Mole' (about a tunnelling thief) and Albert Holroyd's 'Eebagoom' (about a tribe of Northern ancient Britons in Roman times, and possibly one of the funniest strips Thomson's ever ran in any title). There was also the bizarre 'Sea Urchin', who would have looked out of place in any other comic at the time. As well as the visual style of the strips, the curious, blocky word balloons also helped Plug maintain its own unique identity.

Curiously, Plug himself seemed strangely disconnected from his more familiar Bash St incarnation here in his own title (even his canine companion Pug, from Beano's 'Pup Parade', was replaced by a monkey) and no attempt was made to reconcile the two versions.

Still, 'Plug', 'Hugh's Zoo', 'First Ada', 'Tony Jackpot' (about a golfer, of all things), 'Ava Banana' and the rest of their odd stable-mates bemused and amused readers for 75 issues before merging with *Beezer* on 3 March 1979. Why *Beezer* was chosen instead of the more logical *Beano* is anyone's guess, but *Plug*'s solo strip continued in its pages for quite some time (as did 'Hugh's Zoo'), the ugly toothy one continuing to feature well into the '80s.

NUTTY

February 1980 saw the coming of *Nutty*, a rather more successful title which gave Thomson's probably their last real superstar (so far) in John Geering's ludicrous but engaging superhero spoof, 'Bananaman'.

Schoolboy Eric Wimp, who changes into the big blue buffoon and fights crime (badly) every time he eats a banana, has undergone a few cosmetic changes over the years. He ended up in the *Dandy* after *Nutty* folded in September '85, but he and his costumed alter-ego have still had a hugely successful career in comics, annuals and even a TV cartoon series voiced by former 'Goodies' Graeme Garden, Bill Oddie and Tim Brooke Taylor.

Bananaman's co-stars, though, including 'Peter Pest', 'Sports Fan' and 'JR Hood' (based on the then popular villain from Dallas) were less enduring, and have long since followed 'First Ada' and 'Young Foo' into comicbook limbo.

HOOT

Hoot was published In October 1985 and was effectively their last original humour title. It lasted only 53 issues and included much-loved strips such as 'Lord Snooty', 'The Badd Lads' and 'Desperate Dan'.

Since the departure of *Beezer* and *Topper*, only *Beano* and *Dandy* have remained from the Thomson humour stable, though reprint collections are still published in annual form, and in the monthly *Classics from the Comics*.

Since *The Dandy*'s makeover into *Dandy Xtreme*, *The Beano* is now the last of the traditional British humour comics. Luckily, it doesn't seem in danger of going anywhere, at least anytime soon... ●

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THE HOTSPUR

A WORLD OF ADVENTURE!

BY TONY INGRAM

DC Thomson's record when it comes to adventure fiction is a good one. It dates back to the earliest days of British comics, although the quintet of titles affectionately referred to as the 'Big 5' – *Hotspur*, *Wizard*, *Rover*, *Adventure* and *Skipper* (all launched between 1921 and 1933, *Hotspur* being the last) – were not originally comics at all as we would recognise them now.

These newsprint narcotics were 'story papers' carrying illustrated text stories; in *Hotspur*'s case, these included the likes of 'Buffalo Bill's Schooldays', 'Red Circle' school stories and 'the Colorado Kid'.

Thomson already published comics, of course (notably *Beano* and *Dandy*) but they were mostly juvenile humour. The adventure titles were aimed at an older age group, and it was thought that older children should be reading something more like a real book rather than picture strip stories.

By the 1950s, though, it was becoming increasingly apparent that what the editors thought the kids should be reading and what the kids themselves actually wanted to read (and, therefore, to spend their parents' money on) were not necessarily the same thing.

Slowly but surely, the comics proper began to win out over the old style story papers. DCT recognised that *Wizard*, *Rover* and *Hotspur* were established names with a noble tradition of good, old-fashioned boys'. Brand values, to use the modern parlance. DCT carried on with the names even if the titles themselves were changed over the years. *Adventure* and *Skipper* were not so fortunate.

DOZY DANNY
YOUNG DANNY DEAN, nicknamed Dozy because of his habit of snatching a quick nap any time, anywhere, was a football apprentice with London Albion. Injuries had presented him with a chance to play for the reserves, and alongside him was his friend, Don Blake, just dropped from the First Team.

THE TERRIBLE QUEST FOR
DOCTOR STRANGE
Look at this tunnel. What kind of place is this, Professor?
All we can do is press on, father
I don't know Paul, but it required a very highly advanced technology to build it - probably several centuries ahead of Earth's.
The fugitives are trapped in a world of peril and fear!
DOCTOR RODERICK STRANGE, ace scientist, had disappeared in the mysterious upper reaches of the Amazon. The search for him had led his son, Duncan, and jungle guide, Paul Earl, into an eerie, underground world governed by sinister aliens. The searchers found Doctor Strange and now they were trying to escape.

HOTSPUR'S DOCTOR STRANGE MADE IT TO THE PRINTED PAGE A YEAR OR SO AHEAD OF THE NOW MORE-FAMOUS MARVEL CHARACTER.

HOT OFF THE PRESS

Certainly the most successful of the revamped titles was *Hotspur*, first relaunched as *The New Hotspur* on the 24 October 1959 (the "New" was dropped with issue 174 in 1963).

Bill Holroyd's 'Coral Island' and Dudley D Watkins' reprinted strip 'Johnny Jett, the super boy' quickly won the new title loyal fans, and over time countless new strips came along to keep the ever-eclectic mag at the top of its grimy faced and scabby-kneed audience's reading list.

There was the legendary 'Wolf of Kabul', serving the Empire in the Indian heat with the aid of Chung, his faithful servant. Chung was a monosyllabic individual given to beating the crap out of his opponents with a cricket bat, a choice of weapon which couldn't have been more British if it tried.

Elsewhere could be found the master spy 'Zigimar', 'Silas Snatcher, Truant Catcher', Ron Smith's 'Nick Jolly', 'Johnny Jones', 'Napper Todd', Steve Chapman's 'Springheeled Jack', 'Union Jack Jackson',' Black Hawk' and a host of others as the years rolled on, from every type of story going!

Historical tales such as 'Rockets' Red Glare' (set in the Napoleonic Wars) sat alongside science fiction with 'Red Star Robinson'. Black clad mystery man 'Wilson' rubbed shoulders with 'The Iron Teacher'.

Comedy strips like the now rather dubious 'Sikk Parade', about an African witch doctor acting as an army medic, or the rather more imaginative (and latterly less-offensive) 'Cowardy Custer', about a pacifistic war horse during the English civil war brought a lighter feel to the action-packed pages.

Action man 'Nick Smith' was just a few pages away from 'The Battling Brysons' and sports stories starring the likes of footballers 'Dozy Danny' and 'Cannonball Kidd' or Golf star in the making 'Danny Boyd'.

'The Terrible Quest for Dr Strange' (another SF story, about an "ace scientist" held captive by aliens in an underground complex in the Amazon) vied for space with strips like 'V for Vengeance'.

The ever-versatile Bernard Briggs (a recurring character from a number of different stories) was occasionally challenged for the readers' affections by less-successful but still memorable individuals such as 'The Cowboy Cricketer' ("Tex Weston, the cowboy who played Cricket for Midshire", wherever the heck that was),

Hotspur had no shortage of weird and wonderful characters. For proof, look no further than the ninja-like 'The Invisible Archer', the superheroic 'King Cobra' or the later, equally heroic but rather less super 'X-Bow', a vigilante motorcyclist who fought crime with a crossbow.

Another of *Hotspur*'s superheroes was the formerly villainous 'Black Sapper', once a text story character in *The Rover*. Although his first strip appearance was in a 1959 issue of *The Beezer* he now returned to an adventure comic where, as drawn by Terry Patrick, he turned his larcenous talents and his amazing tunnelling machine, the Earthworm, to combating invaders from Khansu (where?).

SPURNED

Some of these strips, it must be admitted, were less than inspired. Danny Boyd, for instance, was as a character pretty much interchangeable with any one of a dozen other aspiring sports heroes. His sole claim to originality was the fact that golf was, if anything, even less likely than angling (as featured in companion title *Hornet*'s 'Cast, Hook & Strike') to engage the enthusiasm

THE BLACK SAPPER – Continued from front cover

But Gregori was no fool.
BEING THAT MAN TO ME, WHY IS HE WORKING SO HARD? THE OTHER SERVANTS ARE LAZY AND CARELESS
HE'S GOING TO INSPECT ALL THE SERVANTS. I DON'T LIKE THE QUESTIONS THEY'RE ASKING
But, a minute later.
THE BLACK SAPPER. I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU.
I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT RUFF
GO FAR AS I'VE LEARNED SO FAR UNCLE GREGORI HAS IMPROVED ALL THE CHANCES OF ESCAPE
I'M SURE HE'S GOT ONE IN THE WEST WING – OR NORTH
Sapper wrote out some of the things he wanted to know
THE SAPPER WAS PICKING HIS WAY THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGES WHEN—
A PORTCULLIS BUCKET NEARLY CAUGHT ME

THE BIG PALOOKA

DETECTIVE Sergeant Jim Ransom of Scotland Yard, is chosen to stop Axel Krag from selling counterfeit tens pressed by the Nazis. The Axel is known as "Big Palooka" the Axel on that road has named him. A member of Captain Guthry's Special Squad, Jim was with Sergeant Sam Hodges keeping watch on the home of Rocky Scarbie the right-hand man of Major Rance, the mystery master crook who ruled Chicago's underworld.

That's Rocky Scarbie on guard at the gate. He's a mighty tough customer
There's one good thing, anyway, Sam. This is the only way out of the house. It should be easy to keep track of Scarbie.
Rocky Scarbie was the man who threw acid in her face, so naturally Ransom hungs on a warrant, search for a different pair of shoes that the robbers would not notice
One morning, Ransom and Hodges were called to Captain Guthry's office
Leave the talking to Hanks tomorrow. You'll be needed in court to give evidence against Johnny Vinca and the others.
Tim will manage. I'm sure Hanks doesn't suspect he's being tailed
But, no chance
Out there. Now it's up to Hanks and the rest of the boys!
Hal Vince and the others. Make sure nobody squeals to the cops
The gangsters who were sentenced to death by their own boss!
other.
That's all, Hanks. Vince and the others were rubbed out today, when the police car was ambushed. Mister Rance has once more struck out at us again.
But that was Rocky Scarbie's work. If Tim managed to tail him, we've got him cold.
But Tim was not able to help. For a taxi-ing Scarbie his car had been forced off the road by someone who had obviously been waiting to ambush for him.
I'm positive that Scarbie had not realised he was being tailed. It is he had that ambush ready for Tim. He must have been told we were on his tail. Mister Rance must have a spy at police headquarters, Captain Guthry
I hate to say this, but I agree. The car taking Vince's mob to trial was sent over a secret route, yet Rance's gang was waiting. It must have been a tip-off.
That's seven of his own gang that Mister Rance has murdered in the past four weeks. I think we should have a talk with Lefty Carella
See what happened to Johnny Vince, Lefty. You might well be next on the list.
Good idea, Ransom, maybe that news will make him crack.
Those guys were amateurs. The boss knows I won't talk. He'll see me all right.
Don't kid yourself, Carella. No lawyer on earth can save you. Both Morgan and myself saw you throw the bomb that killed Archie Bayne.
Mr. Carella, I think that should be enough. There wouldn't be much of a case against me if I did have

SUPER-HEROES, CRIME, SPORTS AND HUMOUR – PLUS A BIT OF SF– THE HOTSPUR HAD IT ALL!

Ivan has to keep out of trouble — so he starts a fight!

IVAN THE TERRIBLE

They filed into the Customs Shed.
SON OF A FLIMSY MISTER WILKES HERE SIR
THIS SMUGGLING RING MUST BE BROKEN UP AT ONCE! WANT TO BOOK HEAVY SIR
THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH ARSON. DON'T PAL MY FOOT BEING TROUBLESOME. HOW DO YOU LIKE IT?
DOOOOOOM

DIM DAN

Dim Dan Dog-Soldier, a mentally handicapped ex-soldier, had taken a job with the Finnish Arctic Fox Company as an assistant to Mr. Smee, a photographer.

Dan clicks for a job with the camera king of Finland!
Desperate, dog-sled after Dan Dogsoldier will recover the lost Dogs for injured Mr Smee. I think
My attention is drawn to a photograph of a huge green polar bear
My word! Here's Dan
A literature, eh? Although I'm glad you've a chequer
I've found him sir. You take him. Take him as far away as you like!
I might be dim but I'm clever enough to be a first class coward. I don't want to be mangled by a horrible polar bear
Just what have a moment sir. You will soon be taking a most mathematical picture
For me, I don't want you to be hunted, the fiercest, meanest, swiftest, ugliest, beast in all world

DID WE MENTION THE WAR AND HISTORICAL ADVENTURES?

Fireworks all round when there's no field guns han dy!
The ROCKETS' RED GLARE
1804: British forces have landed near Copenhagen. Their mission: to destroy the fleet of Napoleon's ally, Denmark, anchored off-shore. Amongst the British are rocket expert George Congreve, a temporary colonel, and his assistant, Sergeant Will Cooper.
ROCKET TROOPS COMING ASHORE! WHERE SHALL WE TAKE UP POSITION, GENERAL?
EH? POSITION? DON'T THINK WE'LL NEED YOU, COLONEL CONGREVE. THE INFANTRY HAS THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND.
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A JOB PERSUADING THE GENERAL TO USE US, COLONEL. ROCKETS ARE JUST FANCY FIREWORKS TO HIM.
AYE, WILL
CASH 'N' CARRY
RULE O.K.

of many readers.

Others, however, were magnificent in their sheer, imaginative silliness. 'Charlie Perks, the Man They Couldn't Kill', for instance, was a humble milkman who "had only called to deliver the milk at secret research station X3" when one Professor Pomeroy, "experimenting to help future space travel", discovered that our hapless hero was "a seemingly indestructible human freak"!

Pomeroy, of course, wants to experiment on Charlie, while Charlie just wants to get back to his milk round; cue hilarious but highly improbable hi-jinks as Perks attempts to escape the Professor's scrutiny!

'The Spy in the Sputnik', meanwhile, recounted the story of scientist Bill Gregory, who supposedly defected to Krasnia (a fictitious Eastern power which definitely wasn't a member of the Soviet Bloc – despite having a Sputnik!). Bill had to infiltrate Sputnik 6 ("the biggest satellite ever launched") in order to stop the crazy Krasnians from dominating the world with Secret Weapon Z, a device which could create and control a giant waterspout!

And who could forget 'The Last School' in which, in the wake of a (nuclear) third world war, much of Britain has been left a radioactive wasteland. After the bombs stop falling, a plucky teacher decides to start up a school in the devastated town of Leebury, against opposition from the dictatorial General Smith.

Insane though some of these tales were, you couldn't fault the writers for sheer inventiveness!

FAMILY HISTORY

Hotspur cherry-picked a number of its strips from previous titles. Nick Smith had first appeared in the *Rover* in 1945, for instance, while the 'Wolf of Kabul' had started life as a text story in the pre-war *Wizard*. The famous Wilson had debuted in the same title in 1943, also as a text story - before moving over to *Hornet* in 1964. He would later appear in other titles, too, while the Wolf resurfaced in *Warlord*. 'V for Vengeance', meanwhile, had begun in *Wizard* in 1942 and joined *Hornet* in '66).

As time went on, lesser comics fell by the wayside and joined *Hotspur*'s pages wholesale. There was *Hornet* in 1976 (*Hotspur* 852), then *The Crunch* in 1980 (*Hotspur* 1059), each bringing their own top characters and strips with them such as Red Star Robinson and Tex Weston giving way to 'Starhawk' and Alcatena's 'Doom Wardens'.

By the dawn of the Eighties *Hotspur*, too, was feeling its age. In January 1981, Thomsons finally decided it had outstayed its welcome and, following issue 1110 (24 January 1981) it too went the merger route, "joining forces" (as the publishers liked to put it) with veteran war comic *The Victor*.

The "great new for all readers" lay to rest a title which had been in existence for over forty-seven years – another sad but inevitable day for British comics. ●

WARLORD

... KEEPING THE BRITISH END UP!

BY TONY INGRAM

Ok, chaps-time for the briefing.

One of the most well-known of jolly old DC Thomson's boys' papers was *Warlord*, a comparatively late addition to the Thomson stable, launched on the 28 September 1974, to be precise.

On the face of it, *Warlord* would seem to be a paper with somewhat limited appeal, given that, unlike say *Hotspur* or *Wizard*, it was exclusively a war comic and by 1974 Britain the Second World War had been over or nearly thirty years. *Warlord* is nonetheless one of the best remembered titles of its time, and was certainly pretty damned popular with the bloodthirsty brats of the 1970s!

This, of course, is an indication of the peculiar, enduring popularity of comics, films and toys (take a bow, Action Man) based on the Second World War in the '70s, amongst boys brought up on a diet of reminiscences from parents, grandparents and assorted relatives.

But *Warlord* didn't devote itself to just the one conflict. In fact, it covered a quite surprising number of historical bloodbaths in its newsprint pages over the 12 years of its existence!

CENTRAL POWERS

Warlord's undisputed star, of course, was the centrespread-hogging Lord Peter Flint, good old 'Codename: Warlord' himself, who fought the Nazis for the duration of the paper's run.

Lord Flint provided a touch of class amongst the lowbrow oiks who dominated many British comics of the time. The aristocratic action-man was a cut above from the very first

instalment when we met him in Austria, just before the start of the war, competing in a gruelling thousand mile motor race. At the time, Peter is lying second until one of the other contestants loses control and our hero has to break off and help, naturally. The other chap's been shot and his fighting lordship is launched into the fun world of the jolly old spy game!

Something of a James Bond but with rather more breeding, Peter was a bit of a wizard, able to turn his hand to just about anything – just the type to capture a young fellow's imagination in those days before multi-channel telewhatsit, DVDs and the interweb stifled it for good.

SEEING ACTION

Admittedly, the stories were occasionally just a teeny bit tongue-in-cheek, but by golly they were action packed!

In that first one alone, Peter gets chased by the Nazis, jumps off a cliff into deep water, swims for his life, catches the underside of a conveniently passing cable car, climbs a tree to escape THAT, then scales a cliff before skiing down a mountain and away. (Yes, the skis were a handy find, weren't they?). Following that he steals a plane from a convenient airfield, ditches it off the English coast to escape German planes, grabs a taxi at Dover (where he 'stepped ashore') to take him to a London club.

All this, in a handful of pages. Phew!

Anyhow, after this Flint meets the mysterious 'Kingpin', who convinces the laconic lord to act the coward in an effort to alienate all his chums in order to create the perfect cover for a career as a secret agent.

Never seen with a hair out of place, the daring hooray Henry was enough of a hit to be awarded his own Summer Special in 1976. Of course, he hasn't been seen since the comic that bore his code name; *Warlord* bit the dust. I suppose a comic titled 'Peter' probably wouldn't have done so well. His loss is a sad one for old Blighty – you just don't get that kind of old world charm in heroes nowadays!

THE FLIERS WHO FIGHT ON THE SEA!
WINGLESS WONDER
Torpedo gone! Let's get out of here—those Japs sure can shoot!
It is 1942, and off the coast of Japanese-occupied Malaya, a Swordfish biplane of the Fleet Air Arm zooms in to attack a Jap supply ship.
Bulls-eye—but we've been hit by flak. Stand by, Sam!
We're losing height and our radio's had it! I'll try to reach one of these islands below.
But as the Swordfish staggered in for a crash-landing
Enemy fighter—AAH! He's got us!
Phew, a bit bumpy but we made it! You all right, Sam?
Yeah—we've lost our wings but we should be safe from that Jap in here.
CRASH!
Hah! Got him, Skipper!
Good—but hang on! I'm taking us into the cover of the trees.
Look—the Jap's crashed! I hit him harder than I thought!
WD 28.9.74

WARLORD TOOK THE ACTION TO LAND, SEA AND – AS IN THIS EXAMPLE – AIR

ALLIES

Rather at the other end of the social scale was *Warlord's* other big name – that rampaging Royal Marine 'Union Jack Jackson', who stormed our pocket money fortifications from the cover of that selfsame *Warlord* 1.

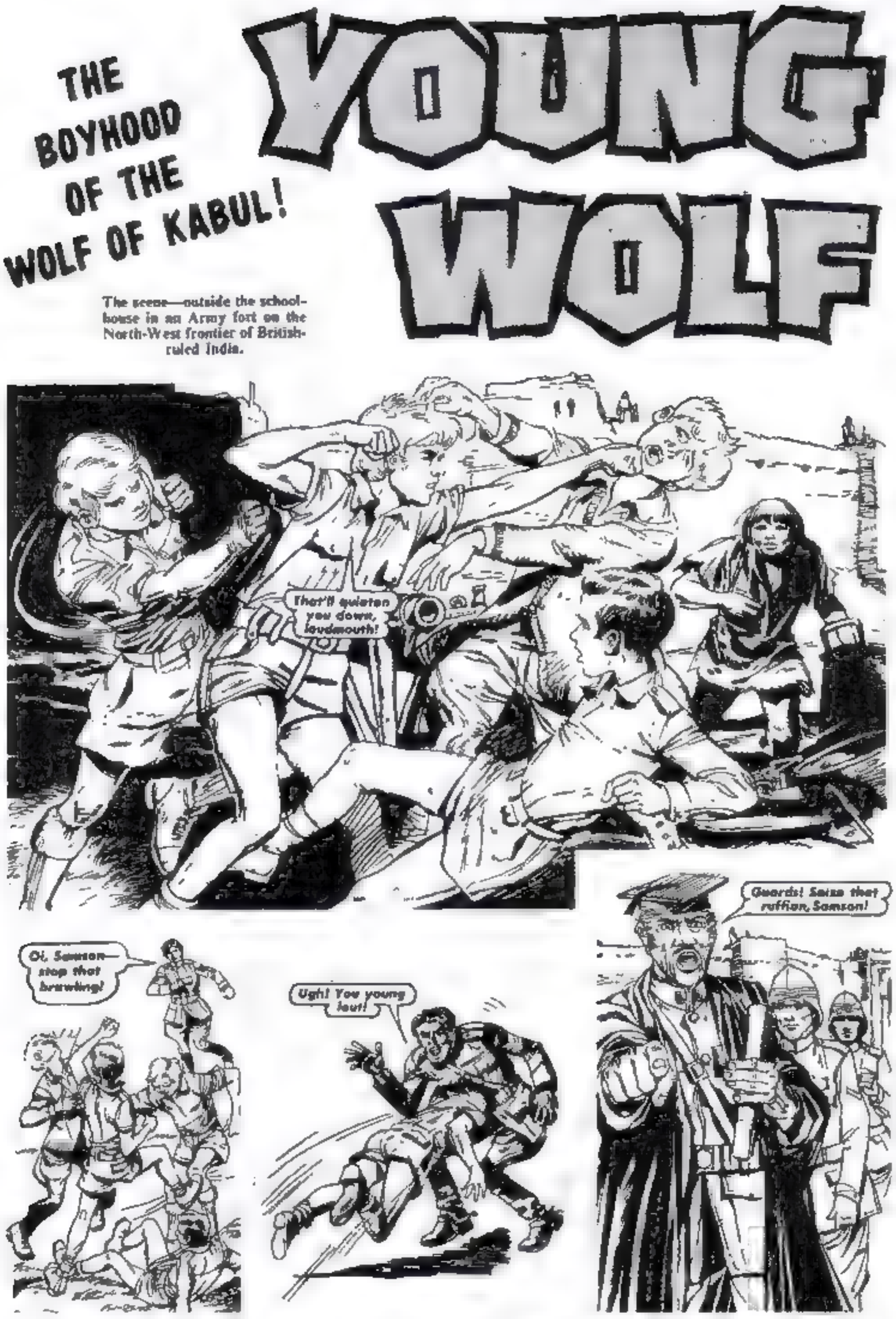
Jackson was, in fact, the cover star, which must have put perfect Peter's nose out of joint a bit. But then, Jack had history – he'd previously appeared as a text story in the original *Hotspur* story paper in 1957 (1057-1071) and then in the *New Hotspur* as a picture strip (118-129).

Union Jack's chief hook for the readers, aside from the fact that he was your basic big, strapping tough guy, was that he was a plucky Brit fighting the nefarious Nips not in the company of our brave boys, but with a unit of Yanks to which he had been temporarily attached. In Jack's case, of course, temporarily turned out to be a surprisingly long time.

Naturally, this provided Jackie boy with endless opportunities not just to stick it to the Japs as likeminded comic stars of an endless World War II have been doing for decades but, far more importantly, to constantly put one over on the Americans!

Jack, forever patronised by his brash, gum-chewing cohorts, would invariably be the one to yank 'em out of the trouble they'd gotten themselves into, usually through their own stupidity. Jack was endlessly proving (as if we patriotic kids needed to be told) that one Brit was worth a dozen of any other blighter's army.

Just to prove the point, whilst graciously deigning to wear the uniform of his American allies, Jackson always sported the Union Jack on his GI Army headgear. Jack was proudly flying the flag for Britain (a gesture that nowadays would likely get him banned from every council office in the land, but never mind).


THE BOYHOOD OF THE WOLF OF KABUL!
YOUNG WOLF
The scene—outside the schoolhouse in an Army fort on the North-West frontier of British-ruled India.
That'll quieten you down, loudmouth!
Oi, Samson—stop that brawling!
Ugh! You young lout!
Guards! Seize that ruffian, Samson!

'WOLF OF KABUL' AS A YOUNG CUB – ER, BOY. THE ORIGINAL WOLF APPEARED IN WIZARD.

Peter Flint may have been the 'star' of *Warlord*, but if there was a hierarchy in its pages then good old Jack was undoubtedly up near the top of the table, getting more than his fair share of covers, but the opening pages, too. All this helped to make him one of *Warlord*'s best remembered features even now.

The fighting marine and his colonial comrade O'Bannion kept their end up for years, Jack continually proving Britain's superiority in any scrap to a couple of generations of kids who really didn't need said proof, because they knew it anyway! Oh, if only Jack's patriotic spirit were still with us today.

ARMY MANOEUVRES

Many, many others marched, drove and flew through *Warlord*'s pages in great variety of war settings.

We had WWII hero 'Bomber Braddock' (a holdover from *The Rover*, where he'd been the star of 'I Flew With Braddock' (1952 – issues 1414-1444). He then went on to feature in a total of 21 original text series in the paper until 1966. This text output was supplemented by the Braddock picture strip series that appeared in *The Victor* from 1962 with strips more often than not based on the original *Rover* stories.

Then there was the Napoleonic wars setting of 'Doom Platoon' (issues 39-50) and the Days of Empire in 'Young Wolf' (issues 1-28), which told of the boyhood of the legendary 'Wolf of Kabul'. This strip made a nonsense of the original timeline of the Wolf story as had been set out in the boy's story paper *Wizard* and subsequently in the *New Hotspur* picture strips.

There was also the First World War exploits of 'Spider Wells' (issues 1-20). This was a variation on a common war story set-up – the kid who runs away and lies about his age to join the army. The difference in poor old Spider's case is that he actually had a reason to run away. While stopping his cruel stepfather from bashing up his little sister, Spider had accidentally killed the brute, leading to his oh-so-responsible neighbour (the pillock) talking the lad into scarpering before the police nabbed him!

Aiming for the Flying Corps, Spider ends up in the Army instead, where he is branded a coward for his natural reluctance to deck anyone, just in case they end up a stiff like his dear old Dad (who, as it turns out, Spider hasn't actually murdered at all).

Naturally, once in France, sensible, mild mannered Wells acquits himself admirably, but is still regarded as a coward by his C.O, by the bullying Skinner, and by pretty much everyone else (he's even wrongly convicted of cowardice). By issue 9, however, plucky old Spider has achieved his dream of getting into the air, although more through luck than judgement, and by issue 20 his name's been cleared and his tale concluded! Well done, Wells!

TAKING A BULLET

Bolstered by the efforts of some of British comics finest talents, including Carlos Cruz (Union Jack Jackson), Ron Smith ('Drake of E-Boat Alley' – issues 18-36), Colin Andrew (Killer Kane), and later on the likes of Denis McLoughlin, Belardinelli and Alcatena, and absorbing the action comic *Bullet* along the way (and with it, its star, flamboyant Jason King lookalike secret agent 'Fireball', who looked about as out of place in this comic as Shirley Temple at an illegal dog fight), *Warlord* marched on into the '80s.

With its stiff upper-lip stars, for the most part clean cut and well spoken in contrast to rivals IPC's grubby anti-heroes in titles such as *Battle Picture Weekly*, *Warlord* remained the comic of choice for Britain's better-bred readers. That was until the gradual decline of the industry led to its being merged with *Victor* in late 1986.

Warlord 627 (27 September) was the final issue, but its memory lives on.

Good show, *Warlord*! ●

WELCOME TO Crikey!

Brian M Clarke *Editor* **Glenn B Fleming** *Designer* **Tom Sweetman** *Publicist*

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Sheep-herder Tony Ingram rounds up the very best of *The Dandy*'s super-dog!

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Tom Sweetman makes the case for Sparky as the best of all the DCT titles.

Um, Letters **46-48**
Crikey! readers have their say.

Crikey! Chums...

This is somewhat of a birthday issue. First and least (but important to us!) is the fact that *Crikey!* has just passed its first birthday. Sherberts, bottles of pop and a couple of Aztec bars were devoured in a frenzy of frantic food fun in the *Crikey!* Shed (no softees allowed). Of course, in keeping with the theme of this issue we should have been celebrating with a huge plate of mash with a couple of cow horns sticking out.

The cover is a big clue for our second birthday celebrations – 70 years of um *Beano*. To mark the occasion we have devoted this issue to the Dundee Demons who have dominated British comics for so long. We missed the party last year for the 70th anniversary of *Dandy* and were determined that masters Biffo, Dennis and Roger would have the appropriate spotlight shined on them this time round.

The temptation was to create a mini-history of DCT but that approach would limit the range and type of articles we could run. Instead we went for a collection of features that highlight a selection of the humour, action and adventure publications and characters from that Palace of Picture Papers north of Hadrian's Wall.

The result has been a series of features that point out the sheer range of comics and characters from this powerhouse of publishing. There is still so much more to say about DCT that, as well as their obvious inclusion in each issue of *Crikey!*, we will make the DCT issue an annual event.

I would like to take space here to thank DCT for the kind words they have passed on to us since our launch issue and in particular thank Bill McLoughlin and Gordon Tait for encouragement and more during our first year. We were going to send you a couple of Aztec bars, chaps – but we ate em!

Anyway... after all that rambling, here it is. The DCT Summer Special.

Brian

Crikey! Chum of the Month is **Phil Clarke**

Writers this issue:
Brian M Clarke, Phil Clarke, Peter Hansen, Tony Ingram, Colin Noble, David Robinson, Phil Shrimpton, Tom Sweetman.

Fact checking::
Ray Moore.

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Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue seven is 1 September 2008.*

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JUMP, FROGGY, JUMP!

by Phil Shrimpton

I began collecting Beano and Dandy comics and annuals in 1990 and, within a year or so, had developed a keen interest in the free gifts that came with the two titles. Their elusive nature, inventive names, colourful designs and finding one, long forgotten, tucked inside a comic are just some of the reasons why I can't get enough of them. As far as I can gather, they are as widely collected as the comics themselves, but perhaps that will soon change as we explore those gifts given with these two great comic titles, The Beano and The Dandy.

Many of you will know the free gifts given with the #1 Beano and Dandy comics. They are, of course, the Whoopee Mask and the Express Whistler, respectively. Only one example of each are known to exist, both of which have been sold in the last nine years, at auction, helping to secure their respective comic a world record price. The Beano comic #1, with original free gift, sold at auction for £6,820 in February 1999 (although another copy of the Beano comic #1, without its gift, has subsequently beaten that price - £12,100 in March 2004). The Dandy comic #1, with original free gift, sold for £20,350 in September 2004.

There is so much focus on the #1 issues of any comic title that the next few issues often become neglected. This is also true of the free gifts. How many of you, for example, will know that those lucky children buying Beano comic #2 had probably devoured most, if not all, of the 8 free sugar buttons (black as jet, best you've ever tasted yet) before turning the front cover?

Was it a bird, was it a plane or was it a jumping frog that was seen on 11 December, 1937, when the Dandy comic 2 hit the news stands? As you may have guessed, it was the latter! The jumping frog was a rather clever little item.

This advert, found inside Dandy comic #2, tells all. The front and back of the frog, showing the tar, can be seen

THE CLIKITTY CLICKER APPEARED IN THE BEANO IN 1960.

here: Readers of the two comics were treated well in the first two or three years, with The Beano giving away eight, and The Dandy ten, free gifts up to 1940. Sadly, but inevitably, the war effort, and subsequent rationing, meant the practice of giving away free gifts ceased.

It was not until twenty years later, in 1960, that free gifts appeared again. In the Beano, these were the Flying Snorter balloon and The Beano Clicketty Clicker. To date, I have never seen an example of the Flying Snorter, although am informed that one was seen at an antiques fair in the Midlands in 2005, so perhaps a lucky collector somewhere has one. I do however know of several clickers, in collections.

There were four such clickers, featuring Dennis the Menace, Biffo the Bear, Minnie the Minx and Danny (from the Bash Street Kids), and each came in a small

THIS BIFFO THE BEAR BALLOON WAS GIVEN FREE IN THE BEANO IN THE 60s.

brown paper packet.

Free gifts, in the later issues, were often incorporated in the front cover story. The Flying Snorter was no exception, with the cover star Biffo the Bear featuring on the balloon.

In the early 1990s, I bought a collection of 1980s Beano comics from a collector selling up. Whilst sifting through the stash that evening, I was pleasantly surprised to find an original newsagent/wholesalers' flyer advertising the free gifts with The Dandy from 1960, the first given since 1940. This find essentially initiated my desire to collect free gifts, in general, and an eager search began to seek out both the comics and their respective free gifts pictured in the advert.

The search was no mean feat, as it took nearly fifteen years when, in late 2006, I finally managed to acquire the highly elusive Dandy Whirlybird, still in original packaging. I know of only one other example which shows just howrare it is.

The Dandy Thunderbang is difficult to find, but several examples have appeared on the market in recent years. The Dandy Whirlybird, as mentioned, has proved to be a much rarer item. There is no doubt in my mind why this is the case. Its flimsy identifying paper wrapper would have been discarded almost immediately, rendering the generic plastic toy effectively unidentifiable. I am sure that several examples have been found in attics and toy boxes over the years but never sourced to the comic collecting world due to their anonymity.

Many gifts, however, had the words Beano or Dandy actually printed on them; The Dandy ThunderBang, The Beano Big Bang Fun Gun and The Humming Birdee, Free with "The Beano" are examples that spring to mind. These gifts stand a good chance of being sourced from dusty lofts to the collections of the likes of you and me.

DC Thomson took full advantage of the fact they had numerous comics on the market at any one time. In 1960 this included The Beano, The Dandy, The Beezer, The Topper, Adventure and Hotspur amongst others, and so cross-advertising each comic in various other comics was a sure-fire way of increasing circulation. In the comic preceding a free gift issue there would be an advert for the impending free gift. From a small feature to a full-page advert, these advertisements were appealing to the eye and are another enticing facet of the free gift theme. Full-page adverts are shown here for the free gifts given with The Beano comic in 1960.

As a child, you'd probably have banged, clicked, whirled or twirled your free gift to destruction within days, or minutes in some cases. As a collector today, you invariably exercise caution when just taking it out of its bag! I can't deny a strong urge to bang the bangers in my collection - The Big Bang Fun Gun, of 1939, being a good example - just to see if they work. Naturally, though, I am yet to fulfil this urge!

One of Ray Moore's (Crikey! fact-checker) latest research projects is to compile a comprehensive list of all the pink advertising flyer inserts found within The Beano and The Dandy comics, which often featured the free gifts. If you have any such flyers within comics in your collection, feel free to supply me (email address below) with details which can be forwarded to Ray.

Aside from the free gifts themselves, the flyer inserts and the adverts in the comics, another interesting aspect of free gifts (mainly in earlier issues)

Gifts Galore!

The following list details the free gifts given with The Beano and The Dandy comics up to the 1970s. We have details of those free gifts up to 1988 but, due to space limitations, have been unable to list them here. Please make contact if you would like the full list.

The Beano comic: Free Gifts (1938-1978)
#1 (30.7.38) Whoopee Mask
#2 (6.8.38) 8 Sugar Buttons
#15 (5.11.38) Jelly Baby Sweets
#21 (17.12.38) Merry Xmas Mask
#36 (1.4.39) Big Bang Fun Gun
#47 (17.6.39) Licorice Bow
#69 (18.11.39) Licorice Pipe
#90 (13.4.40) Licorice Black Eyes
#953 (22.10.60) Flying Snorter Balloon
#954 (29.10.60) Beano Clicketty Clicker
#1522 (18.9.71) The Flying Fizzer
#1523 (25.9.71) The Humming Birdee
#1678 (14.9.74) The Happy Howler Siren
#1679 (21.9.74) The Super Zoomer Balloon
#1818 (21.5.77) Pop Pistol
#1819 (28.5.77) Super Skimmer
#1820 (4.6.77) Dennis and Gnasher Chewy Toffee Bar
#1892 (21.10.78) Super Fruity Lollipop
#1893 (28.10.78) Dennis the Menace Glove Puppet

The Dandy comic: Free Gifts (1937-1979)
#1 (4.12.37) Express Whistler
#2 (11.12.37) Jumping Frog
#11 (12.2.38) Dainty Dandy Nougat
#12 (19.2.38) Dandy Tasty Toffee
#39 (27.8.38) Red Indian Bow and two arrows
#40 (3.9.38) Dandy Nougat Bar
#53 (3.12.38) Dandy Fruity Lollipop
#78 (27.5.39) Korky Balloon
#90 (19.8.39) Flying Balloon and prop
#121 (23.3.40) Nutty Nougat Bar
#990 (12.11.60) Dandy Whirlybird
#991 (19.11.60) Dandy Thunderbang
#1529 (13.3.71) Dandy Thunderbang
#1530 (20.3.71) Red Racketty
#1662 (29.9.73) Korky's Squeaky Squawker
#1663 (6.10.73) Whirly Twirly
#1771 (1.11.75) Korky Glow Mask
#1772 (8.11.75) Funny Face Maker
#1894 (11.3.78) Dan's Nutty Nougat
#1895 (18.3.78) Zooming Boomer
#1976 (6.10.79) Packet of Pop Rocks (sweets)
#1977 (13.10.79) Howly Yowlie Balloon

Contact details:

Phil's article is based closely on an article he wrote for the newsletter of The Beano and Dandy Collectors' Club. If you would like to find out more about the club, travel the Wibbly Wobbly Way to their dot.com home listed below – even send one of those old fashioned letter-thingies. Either way, you'll be happy with what you learn.

The Beano & Dandy Collectors' Club,
PO Box 3433,Brighton.
BN50 9JA United Kingdom
Tel: 01273 673462
Email:phil@phil-comics.com
Web: www.phil-comics.com

were small features in the comic relating to the free gift, such as that for the jumping frog, previously mentioned.

The Beano comic #36 contained The Big Bang Fun Gun, a cardboard style banger comprising a thick, folded piece of card and brown paper inside designed to create a loud BANG! The paper was relatively thin, and inevitably became broken after several such bangs. So, inside the comic were instructions on how to make a new insert, aptly named the 'firing-paper'.

Unsurprisingly, the rarest types of free gifts are the edible ones. It would have taken an exceedingly dedicated and disciplined child not to devour their free gift sweet, whether that be a Licorice Pipe, of 1939, or a dose of Hot Cinnamon Flavour Blasting Powder Popping Candy (try saying that with a mouthful of said item!) of 1986. The majority of free gift sweets that I have come across, even from the 1980s/1990s, have seeped through their packets and damaged the comic, so I'm pleased that most readers scoffed theirs back in their day!

The next best thing to the free gift sweet is the packet that the sweet came in. Naturally, very few of these survive, but here is the wrapper of The Dandy Nougat Bar, from The Dandy comic #40 (1938).

Would it surprise you if I told you there have been more free gifts given with The Beano comic within the last two years than there were given with both The Beano AND The Dandy comics, combined, from 1937 to 1988?

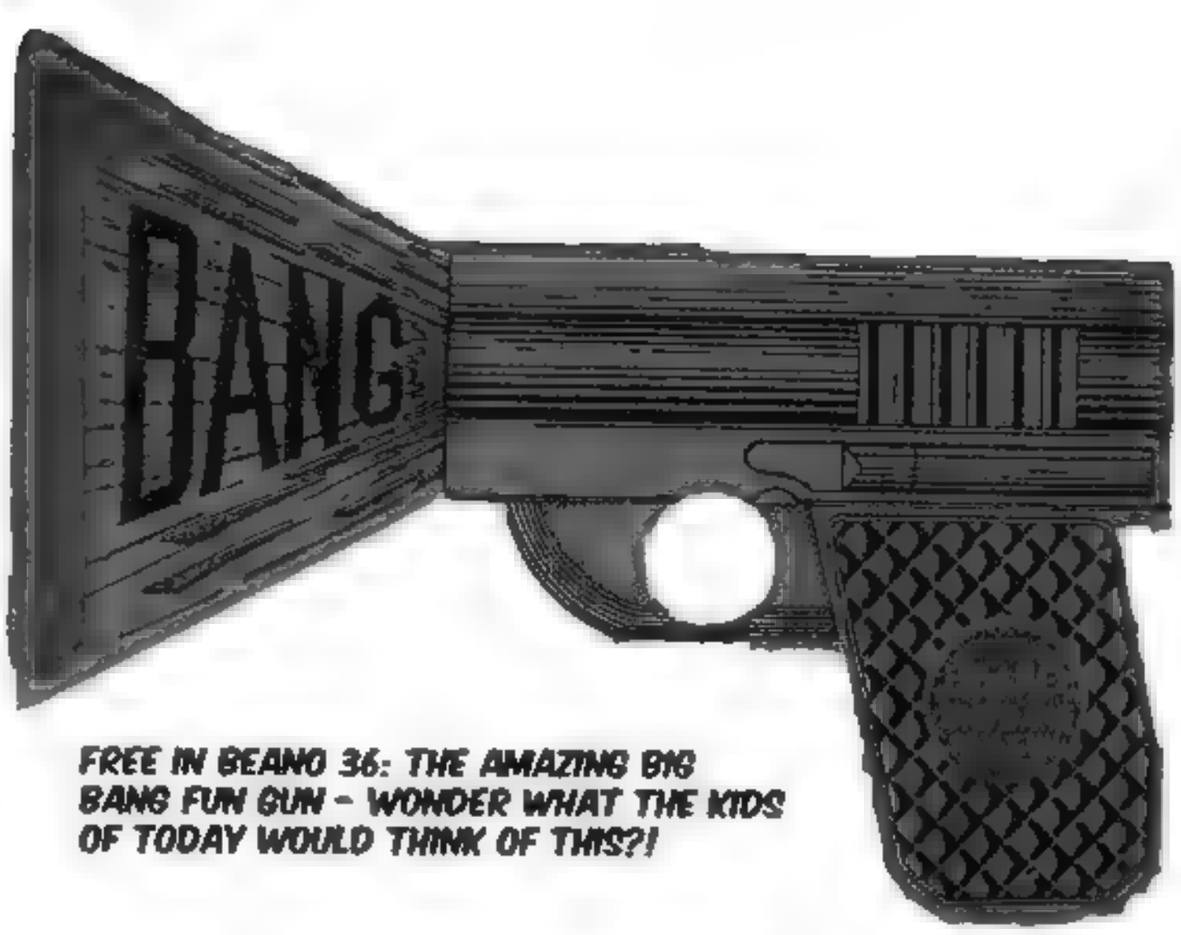
A total of 74 free gifts were given with The Beano and The Dandy comics in their first fifty years. Today, in the world of television, computer games and the internet, publishing firms like DC Thomson are faced with stiff outside competition for the attention of youngsters. Euan Kerr, the former Beano Editor, informed me that the content of the Beano comic gives it the edge over other comics but the gift grabs the attention initially.

Thus, the role of the free gift seems to have reversed, from a rarely given treat to accompany an already popular comic, to being an essential selling tool. Whenever I visit my local newsagent, it seems that every comic has a gift attached. I bought a Dandy Xtreme comic several months ago and it came with no fewer than five free gifts! So is it the case that the comics that are most likely to sell are not those with the best characters and stories, but those with the best free gifts?!

I have no doubt that The Beano and The Dandy have their faithful following who will buy the comics regardless of the free gift, but it seems a far cry from the late 30s, 1960 and the 70s when getting just two gifts a year must have been a real, unexpected, treat.

To conclude, my fifteen year search for The Dandy Whirlybird would be classed by some as frustrating, others as mad! I rather enjoyed it, as it emphasised the fact that collecting is as much about the buzz of the chase as actually owning the item, and shows that comic collecting can (and should!) last anything up to a lifetime.

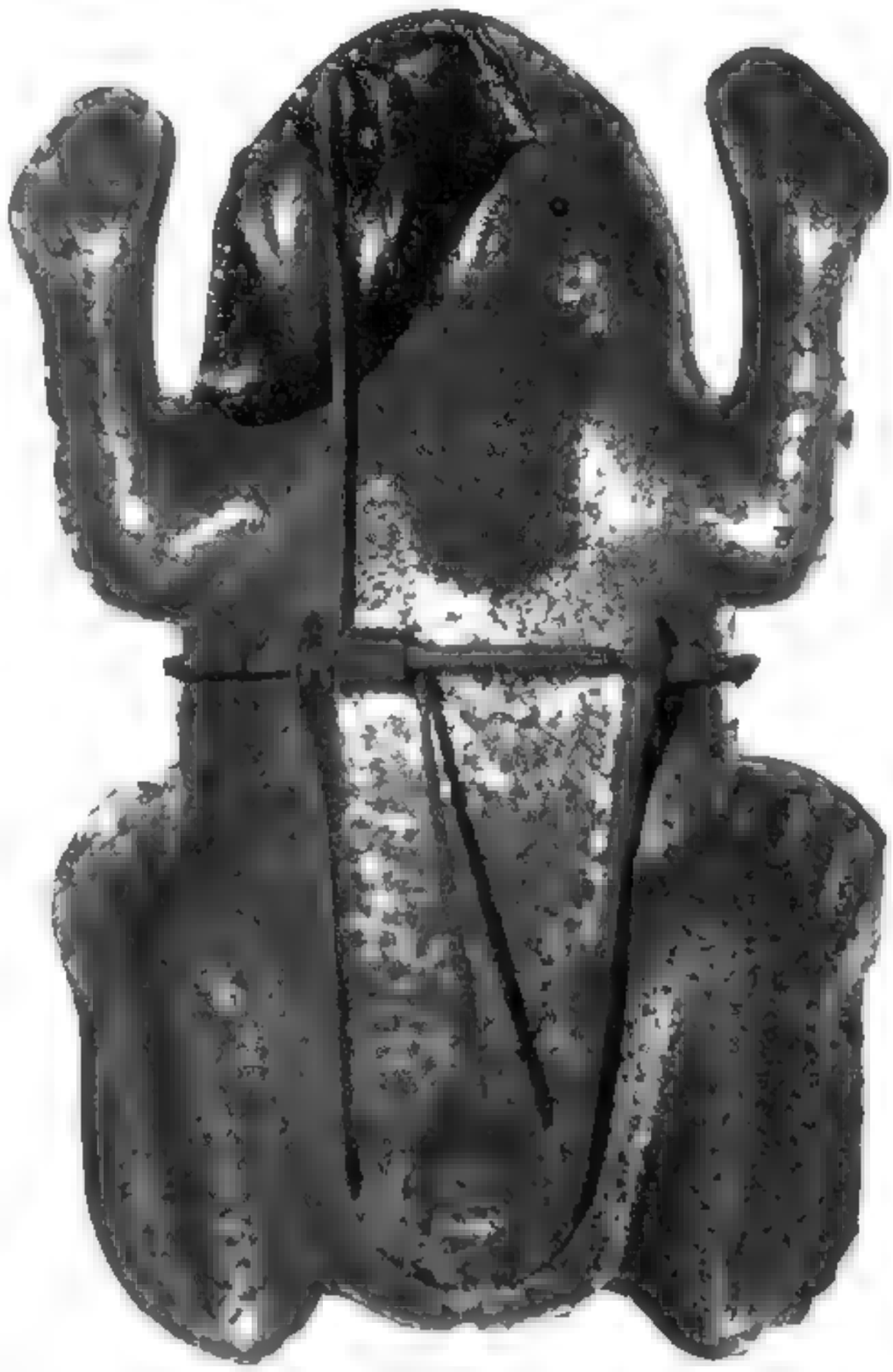
Having said that, I do hope the Flying Snorter shows its face soon! ●



FREE IN BEANO 36: THE AMAZING BIG BANG FUN GUN – WONDER WHAT THE KIDS OF TODAY WOULD THINK OF THIS?!

ABOVE: THE DANDY WHIRLYBIRD FROM 1960

BELOW: THE DANDY GAVE THIS INCREDIBLE JUMPING FROG AWAY IN 1937!



THE DANDY WONDER DOG!

By Tony Ingram

We've always had a bit of a thing about animals in this country – and a curious fascination with heroic animals.

Look at Black Beauty, or Lassie, or the Famous Five's supposedly highly intelligent collie, Timmy (though actually, I always suspected that Tim was merely highly intelligent in comparison to Dick, but that's neither here nor there).

Why this fixation on our four-footed friends, and our constant effort to turn them into the animal equivalent of James Bond? It's difficult to say. Maybe it's because we're a nation of pet lovers and we like to project the best aspects of our own kind onto them. Whatever the case, once books and films had capitalised on this fascination, it was only a matter of time before comics got in on the act!

BOBS YOUR UNCLE

By no means the first heroic canine in British comics, but certainly one of the most famous and enduring, Black Bob first bounded onto the scene in *The Dandy* 280, dated 25 November 1944.

Bob was an old fashioned hero, handsome, dashing, and fearless – with a beautiful, glossy coat! He was the faithful companion of Andrew Glenn, a shepherd from glamorous Selkirk in the employ of hill country farmer Mr Grant (though it might be more accurate to describe Andrew as Bob's faithful companion, since the cunning collie was most definitely the one with the brains).

The intrepid pair thrilled readers for decades with their ever-so-slightly improbable adventures, first in text stories (of which there were a fair few in the *Dandy*'s

Black Bag, the Viz...er...bin liner

'Black Bob' may have rounded up his last robber in 1982, but he was not forgotten – his legacy lived on in the anarchic pages of adult comic, *Viz*.

Of course, *Viz* had a slightly different target audience than Bob's traditional home in the *Dandy*, even in the late 1980's, and so certain changes had to be made in order to ensure that the strip appealed to an older, more immature audience.

Andrew Glenn of Selkirk became Andrew Selkirk of Peebles, and perhaps more significantly, Black Bob himself was transformed from an intelligent, resourceful border collie into a bin liner.

Some sceptics might assume that such a change, effectively making the hero of the series an inanimate object made of black plastic, might tend to limit the strip's possibilities somewhat. And to be fair, they'd be right – Black Bag was, as a character, rubbish.

Nonetheless, artist Graham Murdoch kept the plucky piece of polythene's adventures coming on a fairly regular basis for some years, and 'Baggy' even returned to *Viz* in 2007, just in time to rescue 1976 Eurovision Song Contest winners the Brotherhood of Man from a well!

Good old Baggy!

early years) and later, from May 1956, in a picture strip by Jack Prout. The strip ran until Prout retired in 1968, and then continued with reprints until 1982 (*Dandy* 2122).

Jack Prout's classic style was also seen in *The Dandy*'s 'Tin Lizzie' strip (1955-8) and in Thomson's young reader title *Bimbo* where he drew 'Young Robinson Crusoe' (1962-70).

BOBTAIL

By anyone's standards, Bob was indeed a wonder dog. He could've taken out Lassie with one paw tied behind his back, though it must be admitted that at times a fair bit of suspension of disbelief was needed to enjoy his canine adventures!

Quite aside from the alarming number of thieves, smugglers, spies and saboteurs who seemed to haunt the North of England hills during the course of the 38-years his adventures ran. If you try to compress those adventures into the 15-years or so he could logically have had them in – collies not being noted for their 40-year lifespan – it's doubtful he and Andrew ever had time to sleep.

Bob's own abilities were often quite incredible. Aside from simply rounding up sheep, which is surely all that can be asked of a sheepdog, he also:

Helped Andrew out with repairs (eh?)

Tracked people over miles of impassable terrain (of which there seemed to be a lot around Selkirk)

Drove a tractor (or at least, knocked off the handbrake at just the right moment) to provide a handy roadblock to catch a fleeing thief

Stopped kids from touching electricity pylons

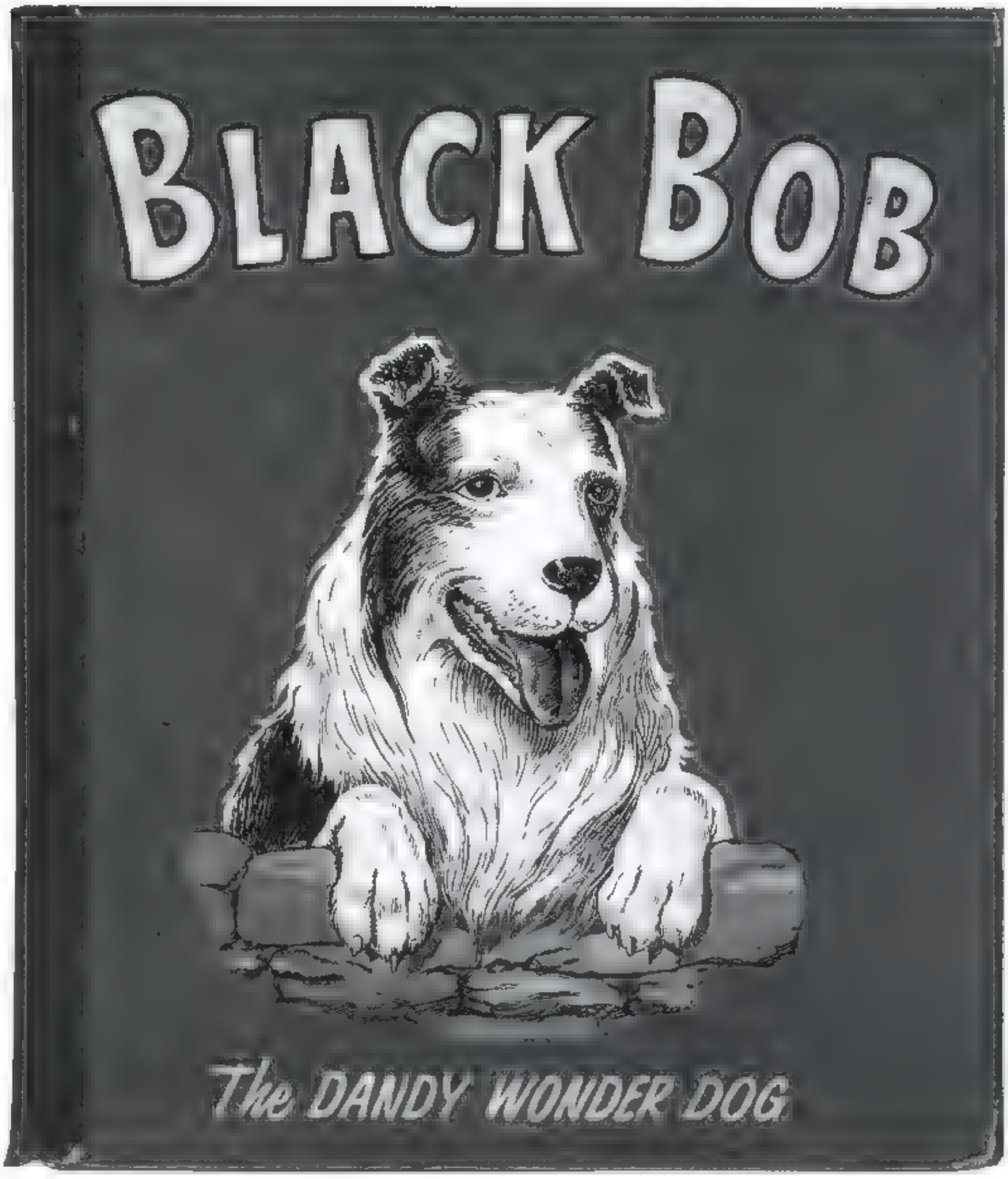
Rescued antiques from burning buildings (didn't the idiot ever listen to those safety first lectures?)

Fought Grizzly bears in America

Piloted a raft through roiling rapids

And most of that was just in the 1961 *Black Bob Book* (he starred in eight between 1950 and 1965, and also had his own strip in *The Weekly News* from 1946 – 67).

Bob, in short, was smarter, faster and more versatile than *Dandy* neighbours the 'Amazing Mr X' and 'Crackaway Jack' put together!



BOBBINS

Of course, these innocent but far-fetched adventures would probably not appeal to the jaded readers of today – at least without becoming even more wildly improbable than they were in the *Dandy*'s 'golden age'.

If Bob were to return nowadays, he'd most likely be able to not only understand but also speak several languages (including Klingon, probably) and be running his own dot.com company into the bargain!

Though come to think of it, maybe not the last one.

Bob would be far too smart to fall for that! ●

ADVERTISEMENT

SILVERACRE COMICS

I'M BUYING ALL COMIC ART AND 1950'S / 60'S BRITISH COMICS, TOYS AND COLLECTIBLES!

WANTED!

ALL ORIGINAL COMIC ARTWORK, BRITISH OR AMERICAN. I HAVE SPENT WELL OVER A MILLION POUNDS IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS BUYING ALL TYPES OF COLLECTIBLE ITEMS. I AM BOTH A DEALER AND COLLECTOR WITH A PASSION FOR ORIGINAL COMIC ART AND PAY RECORD PRICES ON A REGULAR BASIS FOR ITEMS I AM LOOKING FOR. I WILL CONSIDER ANYTHING COLLECTIBLE FROM ONE PAGE TO A LARGE COLLECTION BUT AT PRESENT I AM PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN 1960'S AND 1970'S AMERICAN COMIC ART, HIGH END – HIGH VALUE COMIC ART PAGES, 2000AD COVERS, EAGLE COVERS, TV CENTURY 21 COVERS AND INTERIOR PAGES, LOOK IN, LION, VALIANT, IN FACT ALL 1960'S AND 1970'S COMIC ART, ALL DC THOMSON, SMASH, WHAM, TIGER, DANDY AND BEANO COVERS AND INTERIORS.

WANTED! A FEW GOOD MEN!

BOO COOK, BRETT EWINS, BRIAN BOLLAND, BRYAN TALBOT, CAM KENNEDY, CARL CRITCHLOW, CARLOS EZQUERRA, CLIFF ROBINSON, CLINT LANGLEY, COLIN MACNEIL, COLIN WILSON, DAVE GIBBONS, DEAN ORMSTON, ERIC BRADBURY, GLENN FABRY, GREG STAPLES, HENRY FLINT, IAN GIBSON, IAN KENNEDY, JAMIE HEWLETT, JASON BRASHILL, JOCK, KEVIN O'NEILL, KEVIN WALKER, MASSIMO BELARDINELLI, MIKE COLLINS, MIKE MCMAHON, PETER DOHERTY, ROBIN SMITH, RON SMITH, SEAN PHILLIPS, SIMON BISLEY, SIMON DAVIS, STEVE DILLON, TREVOR HAIRSINE. JUST TO NAME A SMALL FEW!

I'M NOW LOOKING TO EXPAND OUT OUR COMIC ART SELECTION, I'M LOOKING TO PURCHASE ORIGINAL COMIC ART FOR BOTH SILVER ACRE STOCK AND MY OWN PERSONAL COLLECTION. IF YOU ARE A COLLECTOR OR ARTIST AND WOULD CONSIDER SELLING YOUR COMIC ART TO ME PLEASE LET US KNOW. WILL CONSIDER ANYTHING FROM ONE PAGE TO A LARGE COLLECTION OR AN ARTISTS PORTFOLIO AND AS ALWAYS WE ARE PREPARED TO PAY A HIGH PRICE TO GET ITEMS WE REQUIRE. THIS REQUEST IS PARTICULARLY BEING SENT TO CUSTOMERS WHO PURCHASED ODD 2000AD AND RELATED BRITISH ART IN THE PAST. YOU MAY HAVE ONE PAGE OR A FEW PAGES THAT YOU PICKED UP AT UKCAC OVER THE YEARS OR OTHER SIGNINGS ETC. I'M EXTREMELY INTERESTED IN THESE!
IF YOU'VE GOT A PAGE LET US KNOW THE TITLE OF THE COMIC IT CAME FROM, ISSUE AND PAGE NUMBER AND I WILL MAKE YOU AN OFFER WITH NO COMMITMENT OR PRESSURE TO SELL. ALSO! IF YOU KNOW OF ANY ART DEALS, BIG OR SMALL, EITHER SINGLE PAGES THAT MAY BE FOR SALE,

STOP PRESS! WHO HAS THE MISSING 2000AD COVERS?

THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF UNACCOUNTED FOR PRE-ISSUE #600 COVERS AND QUALITY INTERIOR PAGES THAT SIMPLY ARE UNACCOUNTED FOR. THESE ARE ITEMS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO ME PERSONALLY AND I WILL PAY A HIGH PRICE TO OBTAIN ANY 2000AD COVERS OR INTERIOR PAGES AND IF YOU HAVE ANY BRIAN BOLLAND ORIGINAL ART, EVEN LESSER PAGES, IT'S A SERIOUSLY GOOD TIME TO SELL AS PRICES ARE VERY HIGH AT THIS PRESENT MOMENT! CASH WAITING! 01244 680048 OFFICE HOURS OR SIMPLY EMAIL DETAILS.

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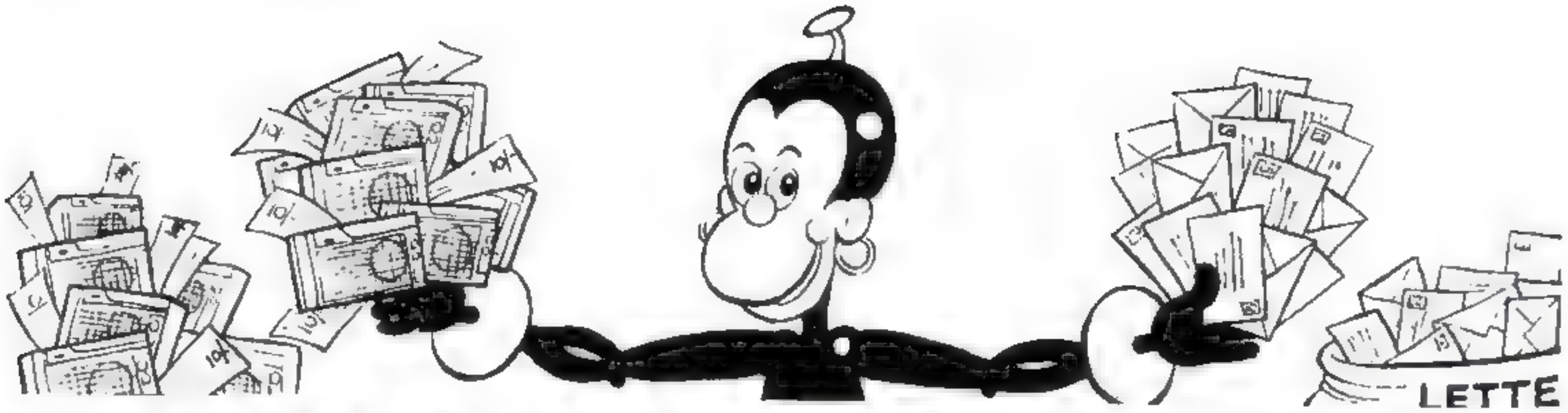


THE CREATIVE SPARK

***Tom Sweetman** recalls a time of political incorrectness, gluttony, voyeurism and an exquisite explosion of kooky creativity.*

We've all been there. That moment when you're finally on the spot. When push comes to shove, when truth will out and there are no ifs and buts – the stark time – the naked time – and the one question. The single, direct demand

What's your favourite comic of all time?

No pontificating about the merits of the *Beezer* vs *The Topper*.

No going on about a single strip was the best so the comic must have been the best (hello, *Eagle* readers everywhere).

No arty-farty asides: "Ah well, *Twinkle* structurally was the perfect paradigm of a comic".

This is the real thing.

What was the greatest British comic of all time? Reader letters and comments at comic shows suggest that should we ever hold a poll it would be a battle to the finish between *TV21* and *The Victor* – both great comics in their individual ways (or at the very least, both great comics with a loyal and vocal fan base).

Well for me it's a no-brainer.

SPARKY (the clue was in the title).

SPARKLE

If you are looking for the perfect mix of humour (and I mean genuinely funny humour) and imaginative, fast-paced adventure then *Sparky* is light years ahead of the opposition.

You could fill the Nutty Notions section of *Crikey!* for the next year with *Sparky* characters and never have to look anywhere else. The other factor that people (yes you!) forget is that some of the most popular characters in British comic history actually graced the pages of *Sparky*. Everyone has heard of Desperate Dan and Dennis the Menace but surely just as iconic are Pansy Potter (The strongman's daughter), Hungry Horace, Klanky, Peter Piper, The Moonsters and the inimitable spy-gal, Keyhole Kate. (Although as Ray Moore points out, Hungry Horace and Keyhole Kate first appeared in *Dandy*, Pansy Potter in *Beano* and Peter Piper in *Magic*).

Sparky began its 12-year run in 1965. You can snap up early copies at around £3 each and at that price they are a great investment. A mint copy of number one, complete with the Flying Snorter Balloon, would probably reach around £50 – £60

FREE INSIDE - The RIP SNORTER BALLOON!
Sparky
September 23rd, 1967.
I MUST GET TH S RECORD IT'S BOUND TO BE A HIT
YEAH-YEAH
SMASH!
CRASH!
BANG!
I GUESS THATS WHAT YOU CALL A SMASH HIT!

VISUAL PUNS KEPT SPARKY ON THE COVER FOR A L-O-N-G TIME.

Eating that fruit was a mistake—Now Horace has got tummy-ache!
HUNGRY HORACE
COME ALONG HORACE I'LL TREAT YOU TO A LARGE PLATE OF BUNS
OOH TA UNCLE JOE
STOP! YOU MUSTN'T WOLF THE BUNS TWO AT A TIME LIKE THAT YOU'LL GET INDIGESTION
NOW WATCH ME! YOU SHOULD EAT THEM SLOWLY!
CHEWING THEM WELL
ONE AT A TIME!
WOW! HE'S SCOFFED THE LOT!
OH MY WORD! SO I HAVE!
WHAT'S UP?
WHY DID HE LEAVE IN SUCH A HURRY? WHERE DID HE GO?
AND HE SAID I WAS THE ONE WHO WOULD GET INDIGESTION! HA HA HA!
DOCTOR DELL SURGERY
(OUCH! OOYAH!) MY TOOTH
OOH! GROAN! THIS IS AWFUL! HERE TAKE THESE SWEETS HORACE I DON'T WANT THEM!
HOW FOR A FEED! WAIT A MINUTE THOUGH IF I EAT THEM I MIGHT GET TOOTHACHE (TOO!)
I'LL SWOP YOU THIS BAG OF SWEETS FOR YOUR BAG OF FRUIT
SURE HORACE IT'S A DEAL
(I'M CRAFTY I AM FRUIT WON'T GIVE YOU TOOTHACHE
OOH! OUCH! OOYAH! BUT I FORGOT THAT IT CAN GIVE YOU TUMMY ACHE
NEXT WEEK—Horace feels a fool—When he falls from a stool!

meaning that putting together a set of this amazing comic should be relatively inexpensive.

Well, when compared to *Beano* and *Dandy* collections!

In fact I've just had a look on eBAY and issue number 4 has sold for a measly £3.50. So if this comic's for you, get hunting!

SERIOUS FUN

It is in the range of strips that *Sparky* excels. The virtues of The Kidnapped Kidds has already been extolled in *Crikey!* 2. This Blytonesque strip typical of the middle class adventure strips that pervaded the title. Indeed the serialisations of classic literature such as *David Copperfield* (serialised originally in *Judy* issues 1-20). and Bible stories ('The Story of David', *Sparky* Book 1968 and 'The Road to Calvary', *Sparky Book* 1969 – both drawn by the deeply religious Dudley Watkins) singled *Sparky* out as a title with intellectual, elite-culture pretensions as well as the more obvious 'make 'em laugh' humour content.

This may have been the reason behind the lack of popularity of early issues as the title struggled to establish and hold a firm identity.

And talking of identity. Nowhere was the feel of *Sparky* more prevalent than in the letters page. 'Write to Sparky' stands as a testament of an age when comics were far more literary than today. The vocabulary needed to read the comic demanded good reading skills. The comic was, at times, stretching and demanding. Witness the Star Letter from *Sparky* 147 (November 11 1967). Set amid a very wordy page to begin with, the star letter that week came from Susan Parry from Cardiff. She won a transistor radio and a Postal Order for her troubles. Over to you Susan...

★ STAR LETTER ★

Twinkle, twinkle, my old dad.
He's just said that I've been bad.
For, to him, it seems quite plain
That Sparky readers write in vain.
He thinks the letters are untrue—
That they're all made up by you.
So, Sparky, please hear my plea,
And print this for him to see.
Then perhaps he'll change his song,
And admit that he is wrong!

—A Transistor Radio and a Postal Order to Susan Parry, Llanrumney, Cardiff.

Ah the age-old challenges of capturing a letters page in perfect rhyme with sub clauses resplendent. What do you think readers? Susan, are you out there still?

COLOUR BAR

I suppose no overview of the comic would be complete without discussion of the cover character.

Sparky (the character) ran for five years through to 1969 when he was replaced by Barney Bulldog. It's OK to argue that the past is a foreign country and that they do things differently there but it would take an apologist more skilled than David Irving not to see the Sparky strip as racist.

A little black boy in a little green skirt, *Sparky* was even more stereotypical than the Robinson's Jam Gollys that

were also soon to disappear from British popular culture.

Bracelets, ear-rings and a most curious red head extension identified Sparky as one of the greatest, 'What were They Thinking' characters to grace the cover of a British comic.

The cover of *Sparky* 140 (September 23 1967) is a perfect example. Beneath the great news that The Rip Snorter Balloon would be given away in this issue is a typical Sparky strip. Sparky is excited at hearing a record on the radio that he feels is bound to be a hit. He buys the platter and spins it on his gramophone. At both sides of his house two neighbours hold their ears to shut out the sound of the record and Sparky's wailing. A quick knock at the door puts things right though as the two neighbours administer a beating and smash the gramophone over Sparky's head leading to him exclaiming, "I guess that's what you call a Smash Hit". Years later Jack Smethurst would move in next door and the Love Thy Neighbour scenario would be complete. And just look at how we take the beating for granted!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Inside the comic the characters were more wholesome. Well certainly Hungry Horace was. As I myself was a child who liked his cake I found great solace in the fact that Hungry Horace loved his food so much. Again time marches on and nowadays Horace would be seen as symbolic of all that was wrong in a society obsessed with getting their five-a-day. Of course, in Horace's case it would be five pies.

His pursuit of food echoed a period when the nation was moving away from post-war austerity and rationing to affluence. In the world of DC Thomson reward was still very much associated with a slap up feast and the constant attempts by Horace to get more and more food was as natural as Roger on a dodge or Davy on a dare.

There's a wonderful example in *Sparky* 207 (January 4th 1969). The whole comic is a splendid example of the post Christmas editions that were filled with New Year fun. Horace has made his New Year resolution on a giant sheet of paper so that we can all read along.

Despite the crossed knife and fork on his never-washed jumper he proclaims that he resolves to share everything with his pals in the New Year. The only snag is that he has nothing to share. A pal says that he has something to share with Horace though and a DC Thomson Christmas pudding appears in Horace's mind. We had never seen a pudding like this outside of the world of comics with its frosted sauce on a cannonball-sized treat topped with a sprig of holly. Yum.

It's the work that Horace has to share though as he is given a brush to clear away the snow from around Auntie's house. (Note to younger readers; it used to snow in Britain at Christmas in the 1960s. Honestly.)

Horace learns his lesson and soon comes up with a second resolution as he resolves to cut out over-eating. Then a table full of lovely grub tests his resolution and his ingenuity. No, though. Horace simply produces a pair of scissors and cuts out the word over-eating from his resolution and then devours all the family's food. A lesson for us all!

The impossibly beautiful snow theme continues in the comic adventure strip 'Invisible Dick' (no comment) with giant snowballs rolled down mountains and sensational ski tricks amid the Christmas trees.

Keyhole Kate is up to her old tricks and Barney is there on the back page in an early incarnation as John Bull Dog.

So there we have it.

Some of the greatest characters to appear in British comics. Some terrific humour and a feel for an age probably now lost.

Sparky stands as the greatest example of that wacky and wondrous mix that inspired the creation of the magazine that you are now holding. If you have to cite one example of just how amazing the comics were way back when, then I submit for your consideration *Sparky* – the most underrated comic of all time. ●

Horace's resolution about eating—Really does take some beating!

HUNGRY HORACE
LOOK READERS! MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION
I RESOLVE TO SHARE EVERYTHING WITH MY PALS IN 1968
SIGNED HORACE
DO YOU MEAN THAT HORACE?
YES, JIMMY THERE'S JUST ONE SNAG: I'VE NOTHING TO SHARE
NOT TO WORRY I HAVE SOMETHING I CAN SHARE WITH YOU
SUPER!
I HAVE TO CLEAR THE SNOW AROUND AUNTIE'S HOUSE. YOU CAN SHARE THE WORK WITH ME!
SPEECHLESS
NOTHING DOING. I CONSIDER MY NEW YEAR RESOLUTION CANCELLED!
FINISHED THE SNOW CLEARING JOB THEN, MUGGINS? HA-HA.
YES, HORACE...
...AND AUNTIE GAVE ME THIS! WHAT A PITY YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SHARE WITH ME! HO-HO
GRRRR!
I COULD KICK MYSELF!
I THOUGHT YOU'D ALREADY WRITTEN YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTION, HORACE
I TORE IT UP PA. THIS IS A NEW ONE
SPLENDID. I HOPE YOU CAN!
I RESOLVE TO CUT OUT OVER-EATING
SIGNED HORACE
WILL YOU JUST TAKE A LOOK AT ALL THAT LOVELY GRUB, CHUMS!
SCRUMPTIOUS! SCUSE ME, CHUMS, I'VE SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO DO!
I RESOLVE TO CUT OUT OVER-EATING
SIGNED HORACE
NOW TO WORK!
HORACE! I THOUGHT YOU PROMISED TO CUT OUT OVER-EATING...
SO I HAVE CUT IT OUT, PA! LOOK!
I RESOLVE TO CUT OUT
SIGNED HORACE

NEXT WEEK—A half-baked cake makes Horace ache!

TIMELY COMMENT

With our modern sensibilities, it's very easy to see the character Sparky as being racist and cry "What were they thinking?" but you do have to temper that with the secondary question "When were they thinking it?"

The Sparky strip ran for 210 issues, half of those on the front cover, so it seems that by the sensibilities of the time no one was actually reading into the strip any racist undertones and if so, they certainly weren't complaining about it.

That being the case, we can hardly chastise Thomson for flouting something that, at the time, patently wasn't an issue high in the general publich consciousness – even if we now recognise that it should have been.

Sparky was a 'colourful' character fronting a comic but I'm sure that he was no more seen as a real 'little black boy' (in fact as he lived in his own house and drove a car this isn't true in any case), than Biffo was a real bear, Korky a real cat or Mickey a real monkey.

Off the top of my head I can think of at least one strip in which Bifffo shares a bed with his human pal Buster. Should this have been withdrawn for condoning bestiality?!

In truth, Sparky was a rather bland, lame affair and it gets undue attention now when far better strips are often overlooked.

Ray Moore

UM LETTERS!

*For future issues of **Crikey!** let us know what you think about our magazine, British comics, your reactions to features or simply make us laugh.*
*Our address is: **Crikey!** 4 Hillsborough Drive, Unsworth, Bury BL9 8LE.*
Our electricity communication conduit in the electronic world is : www.crikeyuk.co.uk

Um Crikey!

I'm absolutely loving the magazine, keep up the good work.

Gordon Robson's letter in Issue 4 and the editors comment after it both got me thinking about what I'd like to see for the repackaging of old British comic strips.

Rebellion are currently putting out a lot of old strips in graphic novel (*Judge Dredd Files*, *Strontium Dog*, *Nemesis*, etc.), Marvel have their Essential series (which I love, because I read them first in black & white back in the 1970s so it really appeals to my sense of nostalgia!) and DC have their Showcase series. All of them are softback, telephone directory-sized volumes reprinting hundreds of pages worth of material.

I'd love to see the same for DC Thomson and the IPC/Fleetway back catalogues. I don't mean the hardback collections of 'The Steel Claw' and 'The Spider' from a couple of years back, much as I loved them. What do the other readers think?

David Beattie
Carnoustie

I know what you mean about the American reprints, Dave. Great bulky size and they remind me of the old b&w annuals I used to read such as Superadventure.

Giant reprints of old British stuff sounds great. How would that work? 13 weeks material from say Action *or* Valiant *or choose a character and reprint 500 pages of their exploits? The collected works of Adam Eterno would go down well. Not sure about 500 pages of Captain Hurricane. What do other readers think?*

Um Crikey!

Further to your email asking for corrections/new information on the articles so far published, here's a couple from issue two.

Golden Broon

From their inception on 8 March 1936 'The Broons' and 'Oor Wullies' were part of the eight-page *Sunday Post Fun Section*. 'Merry Mac's Fun Express' was only the joke feature on page 2. (It became 'Merry Mac's Fun Parade later.)

Broon and Oor Willie were never really annuals as they alternated and thus each one appeared every second year.

You said 11 of them lived in a tenement flat – actually only 10 as Gran'paw always had his own house.

They never lived in Auchentogle. Originally they lived in Glasgow; Auchentogle was the name of a separate strip in the Fun Section where Jock McDade and his gang lived Auchentogle was sometimes referred to in *The Broons* and *Oor Wullie* but always as a place some distance away. In recent times Auchenshoogle has been muted as their place of residence

Jen and Hen were not Celtic or Rangers supporters despite their early association with Glasgow. Their team was The Rovers and could have been Raith, Albion or an invented team. It was never confirmed.

Maggie was never 'In earlier times' called Sadie.

My Comicy Saturday

Ranger didn't debut in 1964 but in September 1965. The artwork accompanying this feature was drawn by R Charles Roylance (Capt Hurricane), Geoff Campion (Paddy Payne), Don Lawrence (Trigan Empire) and Leo Baxendale (Bash Street Kids).

Ron Embleton

Only one artist drew Wulf before Embleton took over – Ruggero Giovannini. Embleton only drew two full-page battle scenes for Wulf the Briton and these were for Express Weekly.

Last Man Standing

The first issue of Victor came with a squirt ring, not a squirt gun. The artwork accompanying this feature was drawn by Alan Willow (Stand and Fight), Keith Shone (Braddock) and Antonio Garcia (Morgyn the Mighty).

Phew! What a Scorcher

Details of strips featured: Paxton's Powerhouse (10 Jan 1970 to 8 Aug 1970) – art by Barrie Mitchell Kangaroo Kid (10 Jan 1970 to 20 Mar 1971) – art by John Stokes Bobby of the Blues (10 Jan 1970 to 5 Oct 1974) – art by Tony Harding Lags Eleven (10 Jan 1970 to 5 Oct 1974) – art by Doug Maxted Cover – When the Crowd Roared – art by Mike Western

Kidnapped Kidds

The artist for the story in Sparky 1 -15 was Dave Ogilvie. Contrary to what was said in the article, the strip appeared before Brady and Hindley were captured.

Ray Moore
Internet

I've said it before and I'll say it again – keep those updates coming. It's only by people sharing their knowledge that the writers, editors and artists of the past can have their work properly recorded and considered.

Um Crikey!

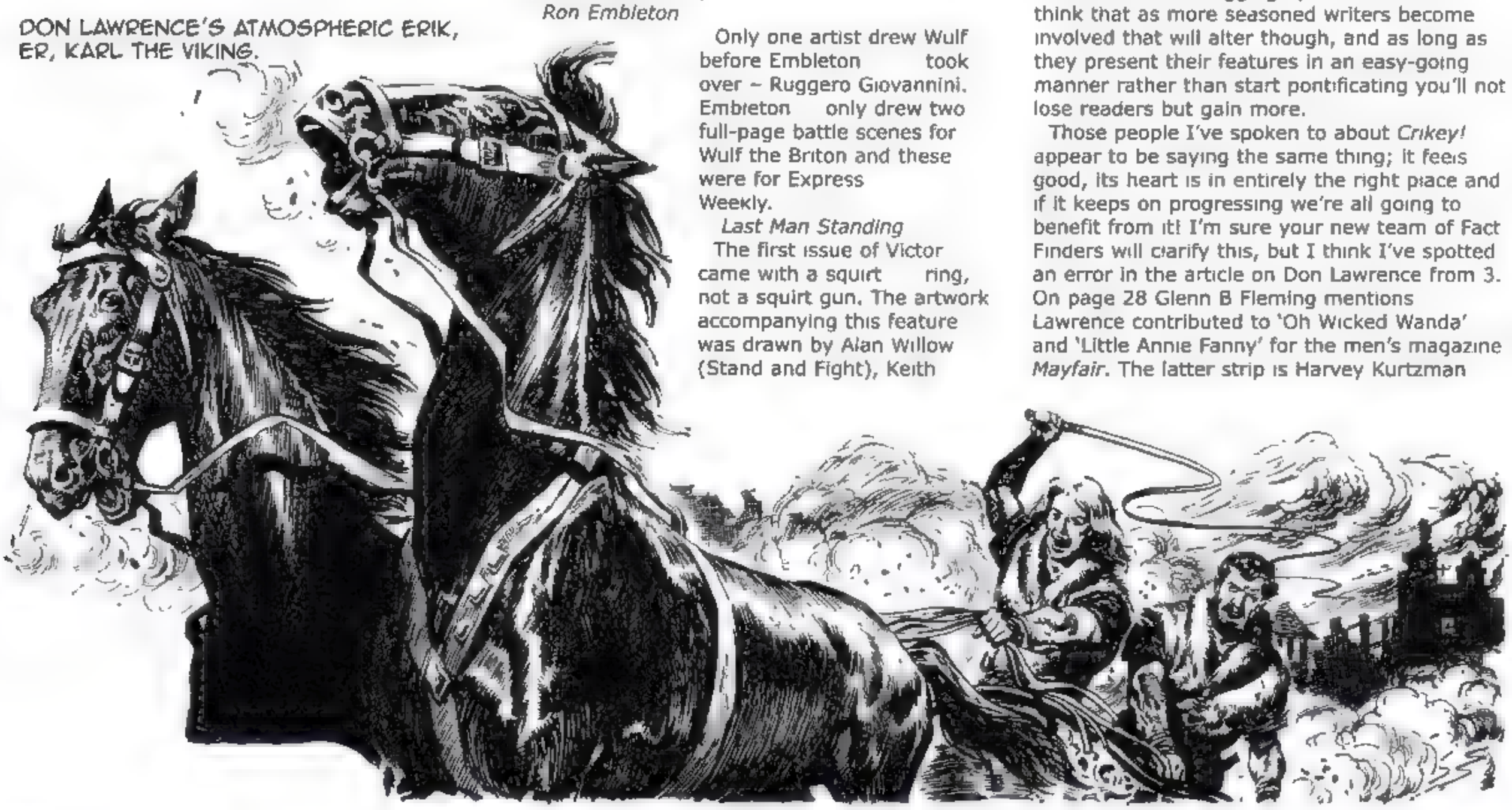
Time's passing far too quickly – I had intended to drop you a line about *Crikey! 3*, but now 4's arrived and I've devoured that too!

Generally the magazine is developing well. Since 2 your editorial comments have expressed a concern that you want the title to be inviting to the novice whose love and affection for his or her old comic reading days has been rekindled, as well as having something to offer the die-hard know-it-all comics fanatic.

At the moment there's perhaps a slight balance in favour of tripping down Memory Lane rather than digging up hard cold facts. I think that as more seasoned writers become involved that will alter though, and as long as they present their features in an easy-going manner rather than start pontificating you'll not lose readers but gain more.

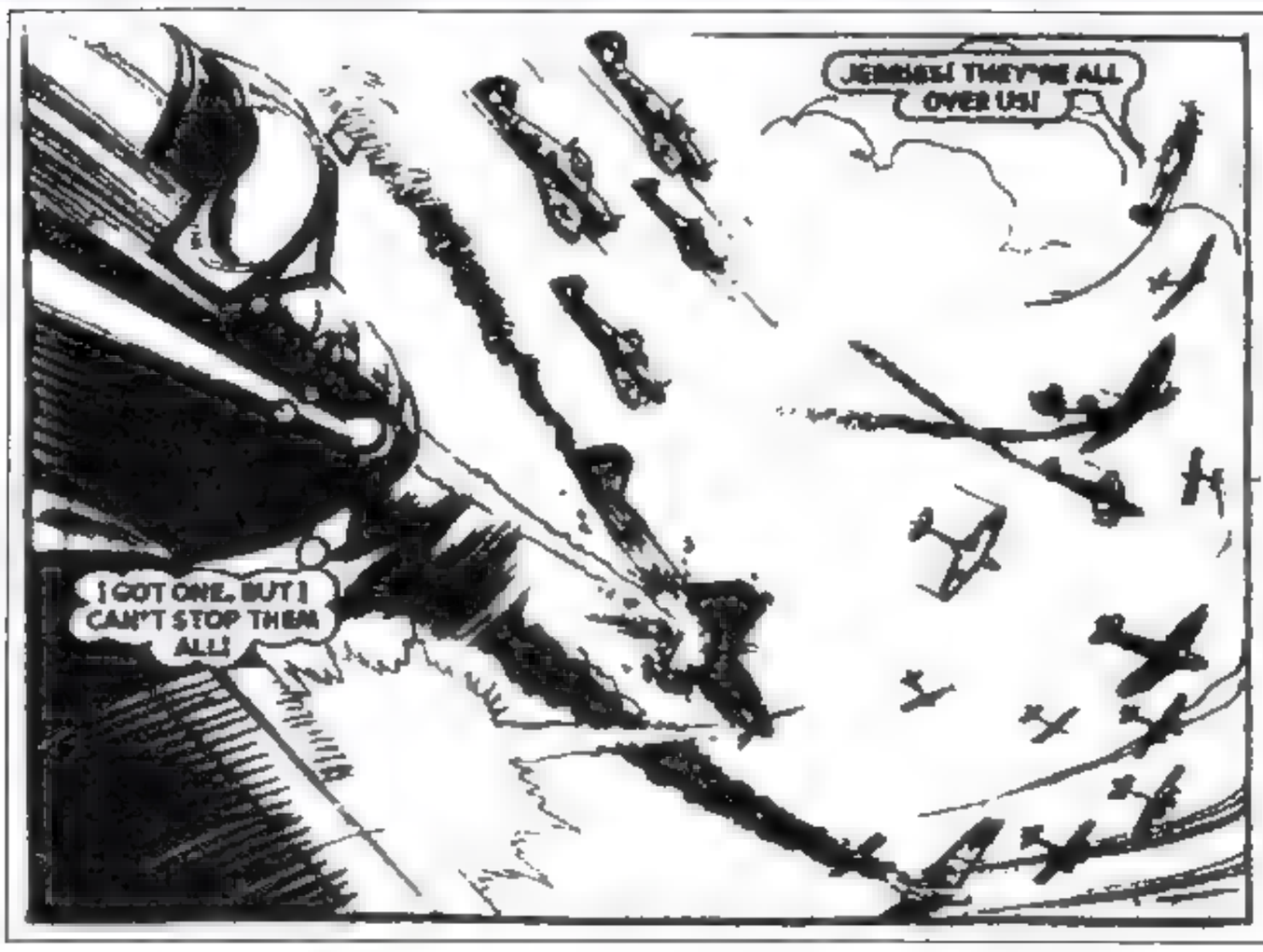
Those people I've spoken to about *Crikey!* appear to be saying the same thing; it feels good, its heart is in entirely the right place and if it keeps on progressing we're all going to benefit from it! I'm sure your new team of Fact Finders will clarify this, but I think I've spotted an error in the article on Don Lawrence from 3. On page 28 Glenn B Fleming mentions Lawrence contributed to 'Oh Wicked Wanda' and 'Little Annie Fanny' for the men's magazine *Mayfair*. The latter strip is Harvey Kurtzman

DON LAWRENCE'S ATMOSPHERIC ERIK, ER, KARL THE VIKING.



NUTTY NOTIONS

Each issue of *Crikey!* features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in the years past. This time round *Tony Ingram* proves that he has read way too many comics in his time... *Ideas and nominations for future Nutty Notions gratefully accepted through the* Crikey! *website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!*



GHOST IN THE COCKPIT

The 'Ghost in the Cockpit' was that of the inaccurately named 'Luck' Layton, 245 Squadron's greatest pilot. His eerie, disembodied voice would echo through the headphones of a flying helmet, giving invaluable advice and premonitions of impending doom to Stan 'Stinker' Tinker (who, with a name like that, could probably use all the help he could get). Why any pilot in his right mind would want to take advice from a bloke who's already gotten himself killed, I'm not quite sure.

DC Thomson must have felt the story had legs (Unlike the ethereal 'Lucky'), because the ghostly guardian later gave voice to his haunted headphones again in order to help out young Rick Starr in the imaginatively titled 'Return of the Ghost in the Cockpit'.

WINTER THE SPRINTER (HOTSPUR, 1972)
ARTIST: TERRY PATRICK

Jake Winter is a white youth raised in the Australian bush by Aborigines. On his 16th birthday, the tribal elders decide the 'Billabon' must return to his own people, and super-speedy Jake, while less than pleased at being dumped back in the white man's world, reluctantly accepts whilst going on to carve out a career as a sprinter.

Only trouble is, before he leaves the bush the elders tell him he must "never remove these white man's clothes" which they have provided.

Another drawback for Jake is that he's not all that bright. He assumes, for instance, that horse troughs are for humans to drink from, that the food in shops is free, and that all white men are crazy.

On that last point – and judging by the writer – he may have been right!

THE HOODOO ON DAN MAGOO (HOTSPUR, 1973)

Dan Magoo, player-manager of Bilchester United, has the world (more or less) at his feet until a rough tackle on an opposing player during a tour of the West Indies has unfortunate consequences.

Dan has accidentally fouled Sylvester the Obeah Man, a limbo dancer and witch doctor who moonlights as a footballer (!) and from then on is cursed to periodically transform into a gorilla!

Let me say that again. And from then on is cursed to periodically transform into a gorilla!

Dan's life pretty much goes downhill after this, as he is forced to spend half his time masquerading as the team's new mascot, 'Tiny'. The moral of the story? Never upset a limbo-dancing West Indian footballer, he may have magical powers.

Can't go wrong with advice like that, can you?

and Bill Elder's world famous strip for *Playboy* (that presumably inspired other features of that nature) and 'Oh, Wicked Wanda' was, from the few pages I've seen, a comic strip absolutely beautifully illustrated by Ron Embleton in the pages of the British magazine *Penthouse*.

Lawrence was one of several artists who did a strip called 'Carrie' in the pages of *Mayfair*.

Looking forward to *Crikey!* 5!

Best,

Paul H Birch

Internet

And now you have number six, Paul!

Thanks for the corrections and thoughts. You're right about keeping the heart and soul of Crikey! *in sync and we're keen to keep a balance between brains and emotions (or facts and nostalgia). We recently did a couple of marketing efforts on* Crikey! *and added almost a hundred subscribers to our list and the feeling from many of them echo what you have said.*

Um Crikey!

Crikey! Is one of those things you didn't know you wanted until it came along. I'm enjoying the broad mix of features and am happy whether it be nostalgia, interviews, history or whatever. Any excuse to see some top-notch comic art is fine by me.

I enjoyed Dave Gibbon's 'My Comicy Saturday' (*Crikey!* 4). He is one of my all-time favourite artists since I was brought up on 2000AD's 'Dan Dare', 'Harlem Heroes' and his 'Doctor Who' strips. I also loved his all-too-short stint on DC's *Green Lantern*. His work always looked like an artist who was just enjoying himself and that came out of his strips and still does.

There's one comic very dear to my heart that I'm pretty sure you and your readers will never have heard of. It was called *Danger!* and came out somewhat irregularly during the early 1970s. It ran to about 20 pages and featured the exploits of a secret agent called Steve King, a space hero called Orion the Hunter and the adventures of a flying boat crew called Southern Cross amongst others. To my 10-12 year old self, it was one of the unsung classics of British comics and I regret I never kept any of the issues. It was not widely circulated as I was only able to write and draw about one issue a month and didn't have a photocopier. Still, my school friends always seemed to enjoy it and I was never far away from a drawing pad and a set of pens.

This brings me onto the subject of independent comics. In recent years there has been a boom in the quantity, and indeed quality, of comics that would-be writers and artists are producing themselves, often at a financial loss. Particular favourites of mine have been *Underfire Comics*, *Strangehaven*, *Futurequake* and *Jerusalem West*. Does your remit include these undertakings, after all they are British-produced and a number of creators are making it on to bigger things. A new comic, *The DFC*, was launched by Random House in May and is one example where some of these creators are now finding a new home – Nick Abadzis and Neil Cameron alongside Phillip Pullman, not forgetting Gareth Ewins' Rainbow Orchid recently bought up by Egmont. As someone aiming to enter the arena of self-publishing comics myself this is certainly an area that I would like to see included.

Finally could you use the colour back page of *Crikey!* to run a series of classic comic covers, or perhaps reprint some examples of colour comic art that cannot otherwise be given full justice on the interior pages? Just a thought.

Best Regards,

Michael Crouch

And a good thought, too, Mike. Of late we have seen a huge increase in the request for paid ads and the back page is often requested. When it's not booked, however, it makes sense to do what you say.

Of course finding a colour page might not be such a big problem for a special issue we are planning in the not too distant future...

DAVE GIBBONS SHOWS US HOW TO DRAW DAN DARE AND THE MEKON...

Um Crikey!

Can I just say how much I've been enjoying *Crikey!* ever since the first issue - I take my hat off to you for actually getting it out there . Each issue has told me something I didn't know before which is all I can ask of a comic fanzine (if I'm allowed to call it a fanzine) and I always enjoy the 'My Comicy Saturday' feature as well - in fact I'd love to write one myself some time.

My obsession has always been tracking down those missing credits for all the decades worth of anonymously crafted old comics and with that in mind maybe I could add a few credits of my own to your last few issues.

In Issues 2's 'Nutty Notions', 'The Blind Flyers' was drawn by Terry Patrick, 'Rob Riley' by Stanley Houghton, 'Brassy Cassy' by Richard Neillands and 'Cornelius Dimworthy' by Sam Fair.

In *The Victor* feature the Morgyn page you printed was actually by Garcia rather than Ted Kearon as suggested by the text.

For 'Scorcher' – 'Paxtons Powerhouse' was drawn by someone from the Giolitti agency, possibly Allessandro Chiarolla, 'Lags Eleven' by Douglas Maxted and the 'Kangaroo Kid' by John Stokes.

In Issue 3's 'Nutty Notions', 'Grant (C.I.D.)' was drawn by the great Jose Ortiz. The terrifying cover to *Scream* 11 was by Brendan McCarthy . It was mentioned that *Scream's* Monster strip was written by Alan Moore under the pseudonym of R.Clark but I always understood that Moore only wrote the first installment and that was credited to him. Alan Grant and John Wagner used a number of different Clark names as pseudonyms (in fact Alan once told me they even gave each pseudonym its own personality). So Monsters' R.Clark was probably one or both of them .

The *Smash* feature 'Master Of The Marsh' was Solano Lopez, 'The Battle Of Britain' was Geoff Campion, 'His Sporting Lordship' was by Douglas Maxted (who specialised in humorous football strips by the looks of things), 'The Rebel Robot' was Sam Fair and 'Sergeant Rock' was by Renato Poiese (actually reprinted from *Hurricane's* 'Paratrooper' series).

Right up to date now - In issue 4's 'Nutty Notions', 'Danny Jones Time Traveller' was drawn variously by Colin Merrett, Colin Page and John Vernon (which is who your sample looks like). 'The Juggernaut from Planet Z' was drawn first by Colin Page and then the great (and very underrated) Brian Lewis with fill ins by Alan Philpott and Jon Davis.

In Jenni Scotts' Girls' comic article both 'Children of Edenford' and 'Combing Her Golden Hair' were drawn by Phillip "Pip " Townsend.

Like you, Brian, I have a soft spot for *Spellbound* and in your feature I can identify a few of the artists; 'The Mystery Dolls' was Adolfo Usero, 'The Supercats' was drawn (as here) mostly by Jorge Badia Galvez with at least five episodes by his cousin Enrique Badia Romero, 'The Tiny Taylors' was by Jesus Redondo and 'Zodiac Girl' by Carlos Freixas. Both 'Paula' and 'The Strange Ones' were actually reprints (from Diana and elsewhere)

BRENDON McCARTHY SHOWS US HOW TO MAKE SOMEONE SCREAM...

and I don't think I'd have picked them as the best of *Spellbound*. I think I would have gone for 'When The Mummy Walks' by cover artist Norman Lee or the beautifully drawn 'Lonely Lucy' by Jordi Franch, but hey, each to their own.

Finally in the Countdown article Peter Ford drew 'The Secret Service' and 'The Protectors' artist was Mario (not Marco) Capaldi.

There - did anyone take notes?

Can I also say how much I enjoyed Bob Nortons' feature on the rarest annuals which introduced me to a whole pile of stuff I'd never heard of before, for which thank you very much.

Can I add a couple of annuals to the list? In the late '60s Thorp and Porter rebound unsold American comics into the now highly collectable *Double-Double Comics* but it is less well-known that they also bound these comics between hard covers to make annuals. I've only ever seen one of these - an Aquaman annual - though I also know of annuals starring the Metal Men and The Flash. There may very well be more out there but with a very small print run these are definitely hard items to track down. Keep up the good work.

David Robinson
Internet

Thanks, David. As you will have noticed, we decided to make this Um Letters the let's catch up on the facts special.

Um Crikey!

Belated thanks for issues one and four of *Crikey!* I was very impressed by both these early and latest incarnations of the magazine, rivalling the likes of *From The Tomb* and *Paperback Fanatic* for enthusiasm and obsessive attention to detail.

From the first issue I particularly enjoyed David Britton's Ken Reid interview and Tom Sweetman's piece on *Misty*, which certainly got me scuttling off towards the website and further wonders. It was a comic I was intrigued by at the time, having seen a few issues here and there, but would have never have bought, being the hardcore eight-year-old *2000AD* and *Battle* reader that I was! Like seeing Jenny Agutter in Logan's Run, it probably stirred up more strange feelings than I was able to cope with at the time...

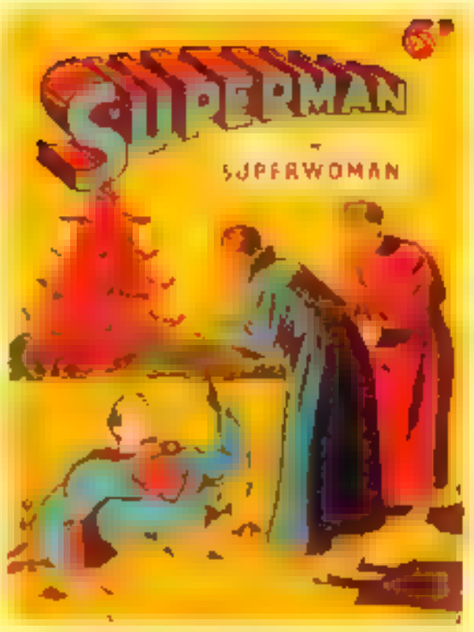
On a similar note, your *Spellbound* article in *Crikey!* 4 was very interesting, especially the glimpse of the Supercats. Hmm, four jumpsuit-clad girls in outer space? What on earth could they get up to? And ten years ago I bet you would have never even considered that one day you might write the words, "Paula now has to overcome her fear of wasps as she struggles to once again play the violin."

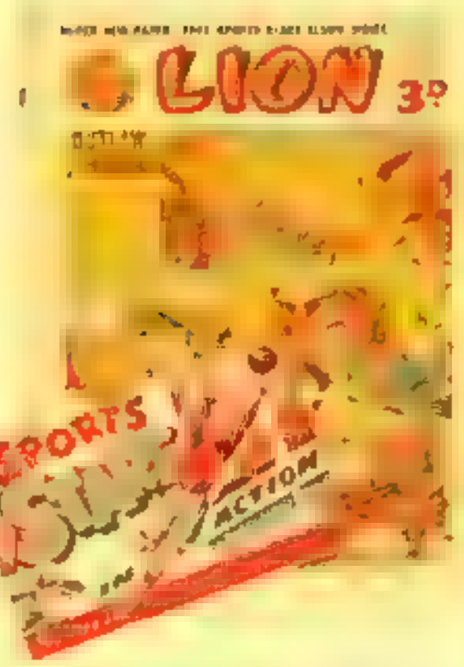
Finally, 'My Comicy Saturday' is a marvelous idea and I'd love to contribute, as British titles ruled my upbringing (I rarely saw an American comic).

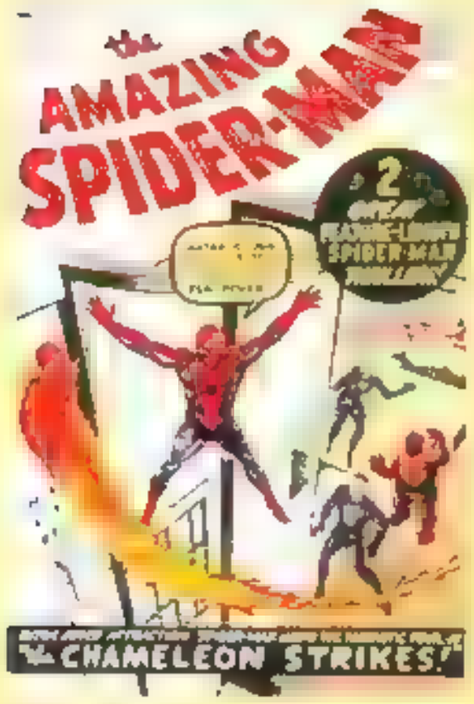
Best wishes,
Martin Jones
Internet

I assumed the Supercats ate chocolate, designed handbags and swapped shoes – is that what you were thinking too, Martin?

That's it for now. Remember: we love to receive letters. See you in September.







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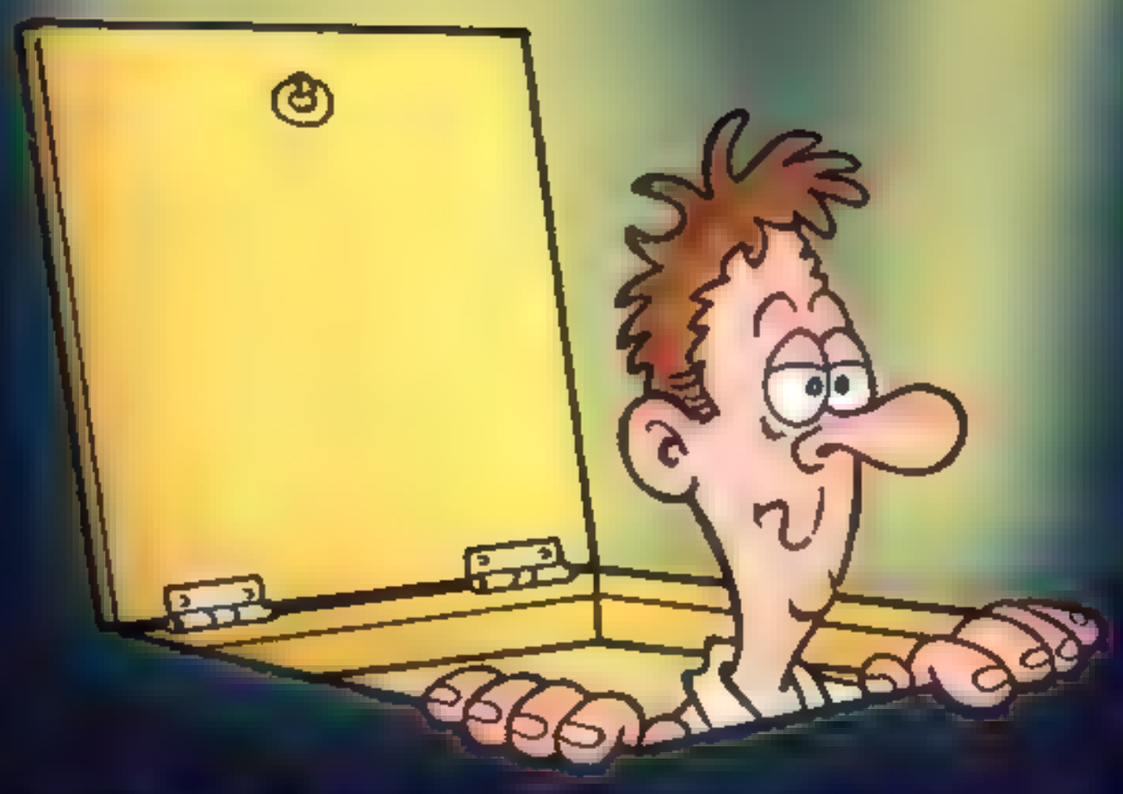

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SKINFLINT SCHOOL (JUDY, 1970S)
RTIST: RON SMITH.

Poppy Clark attends March Wind School, where the headmaster, one Ebenezer Scrape, has turned part of the building into a hotel and tricked the girls into working as unpaid servants.

Every week, Poppy manages to outwit Mr Scrape and yet, curiously, it never seems to occur to her or her colleagues to, oh, I don't know... just leave?

ANOTHER RED-HA RED CUSTOMER! A YOUNG WOMAN THIS TIME!
WE DON'T KNOW IF THE WRITER IS A MAN OR A WOMAN. BETTER G VE HER THE BEST OF ATTENT ON, TOO, MR SCRAPE.

TOO CLEVER FOR SCHOOL (JUDY, 1970)

Kim Harding lived with her grandfather, the not at all potty Dr John Harding, in a cave on the moors above the town of Radford.

The brilliant and not even remotely strange Dr Harding had educated Kim to a very high standard, but those blinkered idiots at the local authority found out and insisted that Kim must go to school like everyone else – pah! Cue Kim showing up smug headmistress Miss Snape every week, and proving (with her amazing general knowledge) that school is utterly useless if you have the benefit of a barmy old granddad.

I'm not entirely sure what the moral of this strip was, but I'll bet it wasn't very popular with teachers! What I'm not entirely clear on, though is, if the authorities knew enough about Kim to insist she attend school, why did they apparently have no problem with her living in a damp cave?

IT'S GOING TO BE ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL DAY, KIM. A PITY YOU HAVE TO SPEND IT IN SCHOOL.
MISS SNAPE IS GOING TO TAKE US TO THE SPORTS FIELD, SO WE'LL HAVE SOME TIME IN THE OPEN AIR, GRAND-FATHER.

CAST, HOOK AND STRIKE (HORNET, 1970S)
ARTIST: PETE SUTHERLAND.

Sports stories were a regular feature of British comics for a long time but one of the more unusual was this little gem.The story concerned the thrilling adventures of young angling champion Joe Dodds and his granddad, Ernie in a series of seemingly endless variations on an apparently rather limited theme. Joe dealt with cheating rivals, angry landowners and nefarious poachers in an England of monocled colonels, irate gamekeepers and fish 'n' chip suppers which not only doesn't seem to exist anymore but was probably endangered even in the 1970s.

Good deeds unselfishly performed always led to a reward, and nobody ever seemed to want to see Joe's fishing permit. These days of course Joe would be facing prosecution for unlicensed fishing and haulage contractor Ernie would be destitute after his ancient lorry failed its MOT. That said, it's nice to imagine them still out there, rods in hand, bored into a coma in some forgotten corner of the English countryside, watching plastic bags float by...

KING COBRA (HOTSPUR,1976)
ARTIST: RON SMITH

Ron Smith's 'King Cobra' slithered on to the scene in *Hotspur* 852 and in the beginning he was, well – let's say, a little bit different. Basically, he was a superhero. A genuine, flyin' and fightin' American style superhero in a British comic. Oh dear, we know where this is going, don't we. It's not that all the basic ingredients weren't there. Bill King, clumsy reporter for the Daily Scene, masquerades as the not-quite-super but gadget-laden crime-buster. But while he is undoubtedly sincere, Cobra did tend to come across as more grinning maniac than idol of millions.

The stories read like a send up of American comics, complete with Cobra's arch-enemy being a grotesque midget called The Mongoose and Eric the copyboy constantly suspecting Bill's secret identity.

Most of the time, the bland set-up can be forgiven (or mosty forgiven) as the lunatic storylines and beautifully styled artwork just radiates zest, zip and sheer unadulterated fun! ●

SUPERCATS AND ORPHAN BRATS

DCT'S SPELLBINDING GIRLS' COMIC

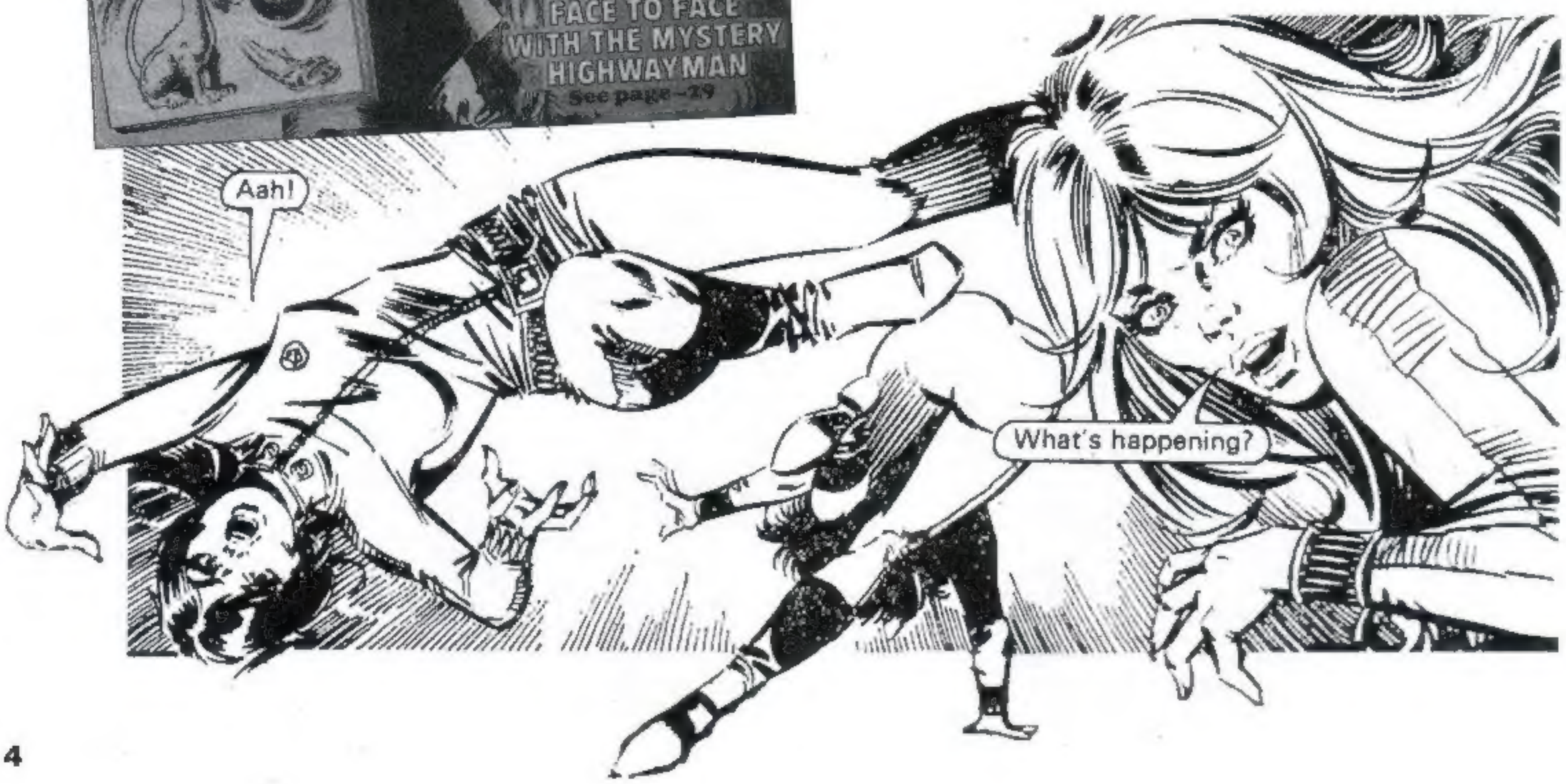
by Tony Ingram

British girls comics have always been just a little bit different from the boys. It can be difficult to pinpoint exactly how – and indeed many of the same talented individuals whose work graced the interiors of *Warlord* and *Battle Picture Weekly* also worked on titles like *Mandy* or *Tina*. So it can't have been anything to do with the style of the creators or the quality of their work

Even as a ten-year-old, I think I was aware, on those rare occasions when the boredom of a Sunday at my Nan's could only be relieved by dipping into the pile of comics kept in the box room for the grandkids, that the girls' comics were...strange.

I was just beginning to notice the differences between one artist and another and to form definite preferences when it came to particular comics rather than, as before, just devouring anything that came my way. There was a definite and noticeable lack of hard-bitten commandos giving jerry a pasting.

There were no seemingly borderline suicidal daredevils doing unfeasible things on motorbikes, or crazed scientists with clunky robots.



There were, it has to be said, an awful lot of distressed orphans keeping horses in the woods in secret, and would-be ballerinas falling foul of obstructive guardians.

They were often well written, oddly engaging in a way you'd never admit to as a *Warlord* loving boy, but to me they were all much the same.

THE CHANGE

And then came *Spellbound*!

Launched in September 1976, *Spellbound* was a rather different kind of girls comic. Described as "the super new all mystery story paper for girls" (for some reason, I still get a glow of nostalgia when I hear the expression 'story paper'), its gimmick was that virtually every strip had some element of the supernatural, science fiction or mystery.

This was very different from the standard tragedies of DC Thomson's other girls' titles at the time. Some of *Spellbound*'s stories were, it has to be said, less than credible, like 'I Don't Want To Be a Witch' (issues 1-15). This was the not-entirely serious-story of thirteen-year-old Celia Winters, whose guardian, Aunt Armida was determined that her reluctant niece should follow the family traditions of hocus pocus. Celia wasn't so keen and spent most of her time trying to fool her dorm mates and teachers at boarding school into believing that everything was perfectly normal in the face of Armida's attempts to get her expelled by playing magical pranks.

Others were actually rather disturbing, like 'The Haunting of Laura Lee' (1-10), which told of a girl 'possessed' (through a ring which kept reappearing on her finger no matter how often she removed it) by the spirit of a dead concert pianist. Laura finds herself able to play like the dead woman but unable, effectively, to stop playing; her mother and uncle want her to exploit her 'talent', but Laura just wants to be rid of it.

THIS 'HANDS OF ORLAC' STORY SUGGESTS THAT SPELLBOUND WRITERS WERE WELL-VERSED IN THE CLASSICS

THEMES OF OUTSIDERNESS WERE OBVIOUS IN MANY SPELLBOUND STRIPS SUCH AS 'LONELY LUCY'

A YOUNG GIRL UNDER THE SPELL OF A SINISTER RING!
The Haunting Of Laura Lee
I happened when Laura Lee sat down for the first time to play the piano in the house that once belonged to the de Salis family. A ring appeared mysteriously on the keyboard, and when she put it on she found herself playing with all the skill of the lady in the portrait, a bewitching concert pianist from the past—Wanda de Salis . . .
On and on Laura played until she was completely exhausted.
Laura's playing had excited her mother and her Uncle Alfred.
Uncle Alfred really does think you should play in public.
I don't want to, Mum, really. It's not my sort of thing and besides, I-I can't always play like that.
Wearily, Laura prepared for bed.
Eventually—
Thank goodness! I'll put it in my drawer and tomorrow I'll take it back to the house where I found it.
The ring won't budge. Maybe I can slip it off if I soap my fingers.
Oh, wait, we'll see, Laura. Have you noticed how well my little Dresden figure travelled during the removal? There isn't a chip on her.
Mrs Lee was referring to the family's recent move to the lodge at the big house, as caretakers.
Later that night—
Now that the ring's off, I can show everyone that I really only play the piano like I always have, for fun.
At that moment—
Wh . . . what was that crash?
2.10.76/1 SPE

Lucy returns to the orphanage—where deadly danger awaits.
In the barn—
All this loot! You do work magic indeed! And thanks to your care my wound is on the mend. But it is not so well with poor Midnight.
Let me see him closer.
The wounds have become infected. Lend me the lantern while I search for herbs.
The shot entered his neck and flank. I thought they were only flesh wounds at first. But he refused to eat, and that is a bad sign.
After a careful search—
How will you get the medicine down him?
I will make it into a physick ball and you will have to help.
To the stable!
Then Lucy tended John's wound.
The wound is healthy. You should suffer no ill effects if you give it time to heal from within. I will come as often as I can.
No. I have a better plan.
I can direct you to an address where you will get good value for these. You can buy provisions for us and live better here than returning to that harsh orphanage.
I could do no such thing! Live on your thievings! Any food so bought would choke me.
How dare you treat me a common thief? You little— you don't know of what you speak.
I only know what my eyes have seen! Your holding up of the coach was wrong, despite your kindness to me, and that watch, at least, I know you took from one of the passengers. I will do this my way, or not at all.
We are in your hands, little white witch.
I will be back.
Lucy returned to her wretched quarters unseen. Next morning—
So you're back with us after your pampering. Living in luxury like a lady. Pah!
Twas not of my seeking.
Two older girls laughed cruelly and made a grab for Lucy—
So you say, you ish-haired outcast. Cinna, we'll show you what life is really like here. Ha-ha!
NEXT WEEK—Lucy is accused of witchcraft.
They really mean harm! There's one way to fight them. Dare I risk it?

Others, though admittedly very few, were simply forgettable, like 'Lonely Lucy' (1-10), a somewhat overwritten story about an orphan (sigh) in the 17th Century who is accused of being a witch.

CAT PACK

The undisputed stars of *Spellbound*, though, were 'The Supercats', "four very special girls who crew Spaceship Lynx of Cat Patrol". This strip ran for issues 1-69 and then continued in *Debbie and Spellbound*.

A beautifully drawn strip from the brush of Jorge B Galvez, although Enrique Badia Romero drew the first episode and several others. Super-strong Hercula looks a lot like Romero's Axa at times, and the line work also resembles his, but I can find no record of Romero ever working for DCT.

'Supercats' was nonetheless ever so slightly mad, with its super-powered heroines, Hercula, Fauna (who can 'change colour like a chameleon'), Electra (you work it out) and their leader, the rather boringly named and powerless 'Earth girl Helen Millar'.

They regularly encountered menaces such as crazed spider-women, cat worshipping aliens and memory stealing plants!

The 'Cats were a hit with readers, flying in the face of received wisdom that little girls don't like science fiction, and even had their own 'Supercats Club'. A 40p postal order (how much? – the comic only cost 7p!) would get them 'a denim-look pouch, a colourful Supercat sew-on patch, your special Supercat code AND, of course, the exclusive Supercat pendant'.

Not very exciting sounding, perhaps, but the Supercat Club did have one thing going for it which other comics clubs didn't – every so often, if a group of club members sent in their photos, they would be the comic's cover stars for a week! Irresistible, surely!

HORSE SENSE

Naturally, being a DCT girl comic, there were some elements that simply had to be included, which is why in addition to the Supercats and mystery stories hosted by the frilly shirted Damian Darke (1-68 and *Debbie and Spellbound*), early issues also featured tales like 'The Secret of Silver Star' (1-8). This was more or less the obligatory story of an injured racehorse heading for the knackers yard, saved from certain death and hidden in the hills by young Debbie Thorpe and stable lad Ginger.

I have a feeling Thomson's editors at the time believed that if a new girls comic was launched without a doomed horse being included somewhere, plagues of locust would descend upon Dundee!

Fortunately, as *Spellbound* found its feet, the more mundane stories were for the most part swept away by tales more in keeping with its image. Gothic romances like 'For the Love of Marie' (issue 40 – part of the 'Cremond Castle Tales' series) rubbed shoulders with science fiction sagas such as 'Dark Days at Torloch Towers' (35-41 – in which a science experiment at – where else – a boarding school unleashes a strange, malevolent creature).

'The Girl Who Loved Horses' (41 – a Damian Darke story) told of an injured girl whose health was restored by the ghost of her dead nag. On other pages, readers wondered at the mystery concerning 'The Face of Romany Fortune' (36-48), a fashion model with a secret past and an uncanny resemblance to a model of years before. The truth, of course, was that Romany was an immortal who periodically had to take on new identities to conceal her eternal youth. (The central plot had first been used in the famous *Wizard* football story 'The Goalmaker' in 1948).

'Lyn Dean's Deadly Double' (39-47) saw young schoolteacher Lyn menaced by an evil mirror image of herself. A few pages later, another young teacher found danger in the 'Village of Fear' (42-52), a peculiar little place haunted by giant vampire bats under the control of the sinister Miss Brendon of Dark's Folly. It just went to show that you should never accept a job in a village called 'Fearton'.

"I am the Spider Queen."
ALL ALONE—IN THE CASTLE OF EVIL
Vengeance of Vampirene
Two villains overhear an innocent conversation

SUPER AND NATURAL

'The Mask of Menace' (48-56) told, as the first episode proclaimed, 'The story of a school in the grip of a nightmare', courtesy of a demonic mask which could control people's minds.

Meanwhile, on the isle of Honan, little Yoko challenged the power of 'The Sea Witch' (53-60), a rare departure from middle class England.

In 1840, housemaid Betty became 'The Ghost of Greystones' (53-61), impersonating a legendary spook while trying to clear her name of a charge of theft.

Whizzing forward in time to the 1970s, the Marshall family moved to a remote Scottish island and were faced with 'The Mystery Birds of Mora' (57-66), feathered fiends which would have given Hitchcock nightmares.

If, as might reasonably be expected, the relentless parade of ghosts, ghouls and ghastly old geezers got a bit much, though, there was generally something a bit more fanciful to lighten the mood, like 'No Cheer for Cheryl' (36-49). This was the ongoing saga of the misfortunes of would-be singer Cheryl Morgan and her controlling widowed mother. Ok, it's not exactly 'light', but the girls who read these comics wouldn't have known what to do with "light", so used were they to tragedy dogging their heroines' every footstep, and at least there were no vampire bats!

Spellbound even had a superheroine, of sorts, in the shape of Princess Irene of Geldania (where?), the bat costumed star of 'Vengeance of Vampirene' (57-65), who basically dressed up like a refugee from DC Comics to combat the evil Count Zukor, who had enslaved her country!

Spellbound had something for every little girl (or boy) – well, the really strange ones at least!

STARLOST

Unfortunately, while *Spellbound* was undoubtedly a bright star in DC's firmament, it burned out all too quickly, biting the dust in January 1978 after just 69 issues (in fact, it merged with *Debbie*, but the *Spellbound* name was soon dropped from the cover).

Spellbound's all-too brief run did leave its readers with more to be thankful for, though, than just a memorable fifteen months worth of spooky stories. It also showed rival publisher IPC that there was a market for supernatural fantasy aimed at girls, leading them to launch Misty just two weeks after *Spellbound*'s demise.

But that's another spooky story... ●

SPELLBOUND
9th JULY, 1977
Broken glasses land the Nightingale in more trouble!
NO CHEER FOR CHERYL
Next morning.
WHAT'S WRONG, DEAR? IS THERE ANYTHING THE MATTER?
NO, MUM, EVERYTHING'S FINE
Without her glasses, Cheryl failed to see a notice by the school entrance . . .
WET CONCRETE KEEP OFF
In the corridor, Cheryl was stopped by one of the teachers.
CHERYL, I SAW YOU WALKING OVER THAT WET CONCRETE. I'M ALLOCATING THIS TO YOUR FORM MISTRESS.
Cheryl "earned" a black mark for her class.
YOU STUPID LITTLE BRAT! LETTING THE CLASS DOWN AGAIN!
IF I TOLD THEM THAT I COULDN'T SEE THE NOTICE BECAUSE I BROKE MY GLASSES THEY'D ONLY LAUGH AT ME
Afterwards two of the girls decided what they should do about Cheryl.
HONESTLY, PAT, SHE'S A DEAD LOSS! SHE CAN'T SWIM, SHE CAN'T PLAY SPORTS AND NOW THIS.
I'VE GOT AN IDEA THAT MIGHT TEACH LITTLE CHERYL A LESSON.
That evening, Cheryl couldn't find her beret.
IF YOU WANT YOUR BERET, IT'S IN THE REST ROOM.
Puzzled, Cheryl went into the room.
Cheryl tried the door, but it was locked.
I'LL MOVE ALONG THE LEDGE
Cheryl jumped down into the garden of a house adjoining the school.
A little boy standing nearby had been frightened by Cheryl jumping and he began to cry—
OH, CRUMBS, SORRY SONNY! I DIDN'T MEAN TO SCARE YOU
THERE NOW, SONNY, IT'S ALL RIGHT. DON'T CRY! LISTEN, I'LL SEND YOU A—
NEXT WEEK:—The tell-tale spectacles
Printed by D. C. THOMSON & CO., LTD., 185 Fleet Street, London, EC4A 2HS.
© D. C. THOMSON & CO., LTD., 1977.
" Listen! Star's giving a warning!"
Nice of Steve to give me these. He asked me to go out with him this evening. I said I didn't feel like it—but I've changed my mind.
You can't! I mean—well, John's worth ten of Steve!
Still up about John! From now on he doesn't exist for me! I'm going out with Steve this evening and I'm going to enjoy myself! Now—clear off and in future, mind your own business!
Over supper—
Steve's a nice enough lad. You can't dictate to your sister who she goes out with.
I—I—just want Chris to be happy.
Later, Debbie went off on her own pony, Redwing—
Chris looks cheerful. I'm surprised at her taking up with Steve. Still, I won't interfere again. I'm going to concentrate on getting Silver Star well.
Debbie was still puzzling over the accident to the car towing Silver Star's horsebox. One of the wheels had come off.
I can't believe John was at fault. But why did that wheel come off and spoil everything?
Later—
You were a good boy to eat up all your bran mash. It'll help make you strong.
A bit of gentle exercise won't do him any harm. Use that flat stretch, down by the lake and . . . hey!
Star's giving a warning! Somebody's coming.
somebody he knows? It's a welcoming whinny!
I must have been followed here! Who will it be? Dad? Or Steve, maybe?
Now, listen! I'll take all the blame, Debbie. I'll say it was my idea and . . .
Star's little stable-mate. Hey! He's really chuffed to see him!
Pippa!
TROUBLE AT SCHOOL—WHEN LYN'S DOUBLE TAKES CHARGE.
LYN DEAN'S DEADLY DOUBLE